A Comparative Exploration of the Middle Way as found in the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Lankavatara Sutra

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Buddhist Philosophy Studies at

Sakya Buddha University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art

in

Buddhist Philosophy

by

Phuc Nguyen

Spring 2025

APPROVAL PAGE FOR GRADUATE

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Buddhist Philosophy.

Phuc Nguyen

Candidate

21 June 25

A COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE MIDDLE WAY AS FOUND IN THE KACCANAGOTTA SUTTA AND THE LANKAVATARA SUTRA

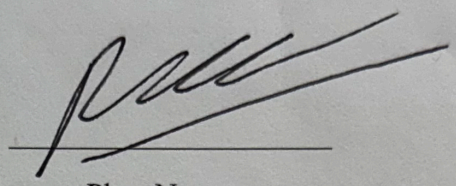
APPROVED:

Thich HuyenChau, President and Founder, 21 June 25

Lina Gupta, Chair, 21 June 25

Victor Gabriel, Committee Member, 21 June 25

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted
as an exercise for a degree at any other institution,
and that it is entirely my own work.



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Acknowledgements

I am deeply honored to express my sincere gratitude to Master Thich Huyen Chau, CEO of Sakya Buddha University, along with all the officers and members of the university community whose support has been instrumental throughout my master's journey. This achievement would not have been possible without their generous encouragement and assistance.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Master Thich Huyen Chau for his unwavering support and for creating the conditions that enabled me to pursue this master's program.

Second, I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Victor Gabriel, and to my research committee member, Dr. Lina Gupta, for their insightful guidance, constructive feedback, and steadfast encouragement throughout the process of writing this thesis. I am also sincerely thankful to Dr. John Freese, Dr. Ben Giaimo, Dr. Tenzin Dorjee, and Professor Catherine Kelley for their dedicated instruction and support during my studies.

Special appreciation is extended to Venerable Tri Quang for his teachings in Vipassana meditation and the Pāli language, which significantly enriched my understanding and practice within the Theravāda tradition.

Although I cannot name every individual who contributed to this journey, I am sincerely thankful to all whose kindness and encouragement have sustained me along the way.

Finally, I respectfully dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents, my preceptor, and all well-wishing teachers and elders.

Abstract

A Comparative Exploration of the Middle Way as found in the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Lankavatara Sutra

By

Phuc Nguyen

The "Middle Way" (majjhimā paṭipadā) is a foundational concept in Buddhism, often understood as avoiding extremes in practice. This thesis explores the deeper philosophical dimensions of the Middle Way by comparing its interpretations in two significant but distinct Buddhist scriptures: the Theravāda Kaccānagotta Sutta (SN 12.15) and the Mahāyāna Lankāvatāra Sūtra. While both texts address the transcendence of ontological extremes, particularly existence (eternalism) and non-existence (nihilism), they employ different frameworks and methodologies. This study utilizes textual and comparative analysis to investigate how each text interprets the Middle Way, the nature of the extremes they counter, the skillful means (upāya) employed, and their ultimate soteriological aims.

The analysis reveals that the Kaccānagotta Sutta interprets the Middle Way through the lens of Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda), advocating for Right View (sammā-diṭṭhi) developed through seeing the conditioned arising and cessation of phenomena, thereby avoiding clinging to fixed ontological positions. In contrast, the Lankāvatāra Sūtra presents the Middle Way implicitly through complex Mahāyāna doctrines like Mind-Only (Cittamātra), Emptiness (Śūnyatā), and Non-Duality (Advaya), treating them as skillful means to deconstruct cognitive errors (vikalpa) and guide practitioners toward a direct, non-conceptual Self-Realization

(pratyātma-gati). A direct comparison of the Kaccānagotta Sutta and Section LXII of the Lankāvatāra confirms that despite surface similarities in rejecting extremes, they differ fundamentally in their explanatory principles and context. This comparison shows that the Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions, as represented by these texts, offer understanding and realizing the Middle Way in both traditions. Recognizing these variations highlights the adaptability of Buddhist teachings and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the paths to liberation from dualistic clinging.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

Before mentioning the research questions and the thesis statement of this thesis, having a quick review of Buddha's history and Nagarjuna sheds light on understanding them.

1.1. Overview of the *Middle Way*

1.1.1. *The history of the Buddha*:

The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, was born in the Shakya clan on May 623 BCE at the Kapilvastu in Lumbini Park (Narada, 2012). Raised in luxury to shield him from worldly suffering, he lived in opulent palaces tailored for each season. Yet, exposure to aging, sickness, death, and asceticism during a rare journey outside the palace awakened existential questions. Realizing that sensual gratification offered no escape from suffering, he renounced his princely life in search of liberation. Initially, training with Alara Kalama and Uddaka Rāmaputta, Gautama found their teachings insufficient. He then pursued extreme asceticism for six years, only to discover that bodily deprivation hindered spiritual clarity. When accepting nourishment from Sujata, he experienced insight into the Middle Way. After meditation for 49 days under the tree, he reached enlightenment or Nibbāna. In the first Dhamma wheel, he mentioned the Middle Way as the Eightfold path and emphasized practicing it to avoid extremes such as gratification in sensual pleasures and self-mortification (Sujato, 2018). Following his passing, Buddhism diversified into schools with distinct doctrinal emphases, but Theravāda and Mahayana are two main tranditions. Theravāda preserved early teachings, including a practical Middle Way rooted in the Eightfold Path. In contrast, Mahāyāna expanded the doctrine philosophically, integrating concepts like emptiness (śūnyatā), Buddha-nature, and the Bodhisattva ideal. Among Mahāyāna texts, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra implicitly expresses the Middle Way through non-duality and the

rejection of extremes, while Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka system formalized this view philosophically.

1.1.2. Review of the history of Nagarjuna:

Having mentioned the quick reviews of Buddha's history, the next part is to review the history of Nagarjuna and his Madhyamakavatara text. He was born in South India, but the exact date of his birth is still controversial. According to Walser (2005), many scholars still disagree on where and when he was born, but it could be estimated during the 1st century and 3rd century. Moreover, he also claimed that Nagarjuna used to reside in a monastery that had both Mahayanists and non-Mahayanists, which was the majority (Walser, 2005). He was a Buddhist monk well-known for Mulamadhyamakakarikā, the foundation for the middle-way Madhyamaka school in Mahayana traditions. In the Madhyamakavatara, Nagarjuna quoted the Kaccanagotta sutta for his reasoning to shed light on the Middle Way or emptiness. The middle school of Nagarjuna kept developing based on his students and younger generations. His student was Aryadeva, who interpreted Nagarjuna’s philosophy of middle school via the treatise Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way (Sonam, 2008). Some Buddhist scholars who also had commentaries on Nagarjuna's philosophy were Buddhapalita, Bhavika, and Chandrakirti, who wrote Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara, meaning Entering the Middle Way, which interpreted Nagarjuna’s philosophy from the perspective of the Prasangika Madhyamika lineage (Trisoglio, 2003). In addition, the Lankavatara appeared after the age of Nagarjuna, and he was a Buddhist monk who brought the Lankavatara sutra to China. This sutra was considered the most impactful sacred text in China and South Asia because it was the foundation for the beginning of the Chan tradition in China.

1.1.3. The Middle Way*:*

As mentioned earlier, it is obvious that the Buddha discovered it during his spiritual journey, which is the main factor contributing to his achievement of enlightenment. The Middle Way, majjhima patipada, generally refers to avoiding extremes or the duality of extremes. The Middle Way is presented differently in two Buddhist traditions: Theravada and Mahayana. In Theravada tradition, the Middle Way that the Buddha teaches often refers to staying away from opposing extremes. In the first turning of the Dhamma wheel, the Middle Way is the antidote to two opposing views, including indulgence in sensual pleasures and practices of self-mortification to reach enlightenment (Sujato, 2018). In addition, the Buddha also states that the Middle Way is the Eightfold Path, which is the method applied daily to not only elevate ethical standards but also lead to liberation. In the context of avoiding those extremes, the Middle Way is very applicable. However, extremes are not only about sensual pleasures and self-mortification but also other pairs of opposing extremes that consist of notions, ego, and worldview. In many suttas in the Samyukta Nikaya, the Buddha analyzes the Middle Way more deeply based on the foundation of Dependent Origination, with multiple extremes mentioned above.

In Mahayana Buddhism, Nagarjuna is considered the founder of the Middle Way school, and people later continued to analyze and develop it, which led to the appearance of many schools. However, Nagarjuna claims that he simply explains and elaborates on the Middle Way in Buddha's teaching and organizes them into the system that refers to his work, Madhyamakavatara. The Middle Way school of Nagarjuna refers to the doctrine of Emptiness or Sunyata, so it is more philosophical than the Middle Way in the Theravada tradition. As mentioned in the review of Nagarjuna's history, his later followers or students, including Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, Bhāviveka, and Chandrakirti, develop Nagarjuna's philosophy.

Moreover, besides differences, the early Madhyamaka school and the Yogacara school have shared common features because Nagarjuna realized the crucial role of Yogacara views in understanding the Madhyamaka school (Garfield & Westerhoff, 2015).

Additionally, the impact of Madhyamaka leads to variants of schools in Tibet and China. In Tibetan Buddhism, Je Tsongkhapa of the Gelug school has different explanations about the Madhyamaka school because this school states that he intrinsic nature of everything, consisting of Buddha nature and emptiness is empty (Cowherds, 2010). On the other hand, Gorampa in a non-Gelug school, had different perspectives on the Madhyamaka school, but his standpoints are impactful in Tibetan Buddhism (Sonam, 2007). From his perspective, any phenomenon does not have four dimensions or extremes like existence, non-existence, both of them, and none of them, which refer to the Emptiness (Cabezon, et. al, 2007), so this tradition looks at reality as illusions. Looking at Chinese Buddhist schools, in the Tendan school, the Madhyamaka refers to the combination of the Emptiness of all things and phenomenal things (Kohn, 1991). In the Chan tradition, Huneing, the sixth patriarch, teaches that the Middle Way is a way of being free from one side of a pair of sides of any problem in chapter ten of the Platform Sutra (Hsuan, 2010). Although various schools have numerous interpretations about Madhyamaka, all of them are based on Nagarjuna's philosophy.

Obviously, the Middle Way in Theravada is different from the Middle Way in Mahayana in terms of interpretation because its interpretation is more understandable to apply in real life. From the perspective of Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and the development of other schools stress the philosophical aspect rather than the practical aspect. Conversely, the Mahayana Buddhism judges that the Theravada Buddhism is too conservative and inflexible to change. However, both opinions limit and hold them in their own traditions, which is opposed to

the thought of liberation in Buddhism. Therefore, the Middle Way needs interpretations from both traditions to help Buddhists understand and practice it.

1.2. Research Problem

Having reviewed the Middle Way in both traditions, different interpretations in both Theravada and Mahayana need a connection to bridge the gaps. As mentioned above, Nagarjuna's philosophy is the foundation for most later Buddhist schools, so beginning to study his Mulamadhyamakakarikā text is the key to linking both of them in terms of the Middle Way. Furthermore, Nagarjuna lives in a monastery that contains both Mahayanists and non-Mahayanists. Walser's study found (2005) the following:

> In view of the discussion concerning Nagarjuna's date and location, and the evidence from inscriptions, Chinese pilgrims, and Buddhist doxographies discussed in the introduction, it is highly unlikely that Nagarjuna could have lived in an exclusively Maháyána monastery. It is much more likely that he lived in a mixed monastery. (p. 87)

Hence, his philosophy could be influenced by both Theravada and Mahayana. In the Madhyamaka text, he quoted the Kaccānagotta sutta for his reasoning. This sutra has parallel Sanskrit versions found in Agama systems. The Kaccānagotta sutta, a brief sutta, plays a crucial role in understanding the Middle Way because it carries a very profound content. From Nagarjuna to contemporary scholars such as Bhikkhu Bodhi, Bhikkhu Sujato, Thich Nhat Hanh, and others, this sutra has been analyzed and explained many times from many perspectives and Buddhist schools, so it proves that this sutta is a rare sutta that can bridge the gaps between Theravada and Mahayana. Nevertheless, most scholars study it from the perspective of tradition rather than both traditions. They ignore it as the connection between both traditions and have not

explored the comparison between the Middle Way in the Kaccānagotta sutta and the Middle Way in a specific sutra in Mahayana Buddhism.

In Chan or Zen Buddhism, the Lankavatara Sutra is the most sacred text since Bodhidharma brought it to China. According to Wang (2003), this sutra contains the most fundamental notions in Mahayana Buddhism, which consist of Emptiness, Buddha-nature, luminous mind and the Yogacara philosophy. Most people rarely notice the thought of the Middle Way, but some reasons prove the philosophy of the Middle Way taught in the Lanakavartara Sutra. First, Suzuki, the first person to translate it into English, states that the Middle Way is indirectly mentioned by opposing sides in this sutra. Furthermore, he also claims that all Mahayana concepts in this sutra are not organized systematically, so readers with their own religious experiences find pieces in the sutra and put them into a system. Therefore, finding parts in this sutra and putting them into the context of the Middle Way makes sense. In addition, Li (2012) claims that the different version of Kaccānagotta Sutta was included in the Lankavatara, which is evidence of the thought of the Middle Way in the Lankavatara. Additionally, it also leads to the demand for the comparison of the version of Kaccānagotta Sutta in the Pali Canon and the version in the Lanakavatara Sutra.

Studying the Middle Way in both traditions leads to a broader view of the Middle Way to connect Theravada Buddhism and the Mahayana Buddhism. In other words, it allows people to detach from the traditions or cultures to approach the Middle Way. Therefore, this thesis explores the Middle Way found in the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Lankavatara Sutra.

1.3. Research Questions

The problems are presented above, so this thesis explores the Middle Way in the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Lankavatara Sutra. For the Kaccānagotta Sutta, this thesis interprets the Middle Way and compares it to the Middle Way in the Lanakavatara Sutra. Additionally, the comparison between the Kaccānagotta Sutta and its version in the Lankavatara Sutra is conducted to find differences and similarities to have a better understanding of the Middle Way. The interpretations of the Middle Way in the Lanakavatara are essential for comparison with the Middle Way in the Kaccānagotta Sutta because the Middle Way in the Lanakavatara sutra is put in the system that has all fundamental concepts in the Mahayana sutra. Therefore, to perform demands above, this thesis finds solutions for the following questions: How is the Middle Way interpreted in the Kaccānagotta Sutta? How is the Middle Way interpreted in the Lankavatara Sutra? What is the comparison between the Middle Way in the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Middle Way in the Lankavatara Sutra? What are the comparisons between the Kaccānagotta Sutta and its version in the Lanakavatara Sutra?

1.4. Methodology

This thesis uses two methods to answer four research questions. First of all, the methodology used for the first two questions in this research is a textual analysis to explore the Middle Way in the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Middle Way in the Lankavatara Sutra. It consists of history, summary, theme, key term, and interpretation, which offers a critical analysis of exploring the Middle Way in Kaccānagotta sutta, and in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra. The findings from these initial analyses provide the foundation for the comparative analysis conducted in the subsequent question.

In the question of comparison, a comparison analysis is used to compare the Middle Way in Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Middle Way in the Lankavatara Sutra. This section compares the sutras point by point across five key categories: ontological framework, source of error, skillful means (upāya), right view (sammā-diṭṭhi), and self-realization (pratyātma-gati).

According to Li (2012), the Kaccānagotta Sutta is quoted in the Lankavatara Sutra, which is considered section LXII in the Lankavatara Sutra. Therefore, the further comparison between the Kaccānagotta Sutta and section LXII in the Lankavatara Sutra is to examine whether the claim is true or not. It includes historical context, foundational principles, and non-self versus nihilism. The main theme of this project is the discussion on how the Middle Way is found in sutras and a comparison between them, so that it becomes the basis to understand the meaning of the Middle Way and its effects, including detaching extremes or wrong views.

1.7. Personal Background and Possible Biases:

My academic background is in biomedical engineering, with a strong foundation in physics. Although I no longer work in this field, the analytical and systematic thinking I developed through these disciplines continues to shape my approach to studying Buddhism. From a young age, I was deeply impressed by the figure of the Buddha, which led me to seek wisdom-related books that reflected Buddhist principles. At the time, I did not have access to Buddhist scriptures due to the absence of the internet, so I gravitated toward philosophical works instead. Furthermore, Jiddu Krishnamurti had a profound influence on me because his dualistic philosophy deeply resonated with me, so I came to realize that many of Krishnamurti's ideas are aligned with Buddhist philosophy, which likely explains my long-standing interest.

As a practitioner within the Mahāyāna tradition, I have studied various Mahāyāna doctrines and often encountered perceived contradictions with Theravāda teachings. However,

through my engagement with Theravāda scriptures, particularly the Pāli Canon, I have come to see how they can enrich and clarify the often abstract teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism. This realization has also made me aware of my own potential bias that is a tendency to overlook the distinctions between these traditions due to a personal inclination toward seeing their unity. In addition, I place greater value on practice over theory, which may further influence my reasoning and interpretation. Recognizing this bias is essential in order to conduct a more balanced and critically engaged comparative study.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

There are some studies regarding the Middle Way, the Kaccānagotta sutta, the Lankavatara sutra, and others, which include right views, right understanding, and the two extremes. However, none of scholars compare the Middle Way in the Kaccānagotta sutta with the Middle Way in the Lankavatara sutra. Moreover, the Middle Way in the Lankavatara sutra is implied via dualistic extremes. Therefore, The literary review focuses on the Kaccānagotta sutta, the Lankavatara sutra, and many secondary sources. The Kaccānagotta sutta, belonging to the Nidanasamyutta section of Samyutta Nikaya, is a prominent sutta because it briefly delivers profound content about the wisdom of the Middle Way in terms of the right view. Additionally, it was found in Nagajurna's Middle Way, and many contemporary scholars have commented about it. The Lankavatara Sutra mainly focuses on Mind-only, Buddha-nature, Emptiness, Non-duality, and other complicated concepts, but the Middle Way is not directly mentioned in the sutra. However, it is implied in the sutra via opposing pairs, two extremes, or non-duality, which can impact on the thoughts of Nagarjuna, who is well-known for the philosophy of the Middle Way. This literature review will go through primary sources, secondary resources, and articles, books, research conducted by many scholars.

2.2. Primary sources

Samyutta Nikaya

Samyutta Nikaya is one of five Nikayas in Early Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism. There are five books in the Samyutta Nikaya. Samyutta Nikaya is organized and divided into five main books, including the book with verse Sagathavagga, the book of Causation Nidānavagga,

the book of the aggregates Khandhavagga, the book of the six sense fields Salayatanavagga, and the book of the path Maggavagga. Every book has its main topic as its title, and others have their main topics. The book of the Causation is about the dependent origination, or the twelve links, and is divided into sub-chapters. Some scholars (Sugato or Bodhi) categorize them into the Four Noble Truths framework based on their topics. Therefore, the five aggregates and the six sense fields are put into the first Noble Truth, and the dependent origination is put into the second Noble Truth. The dependent cessation is the Third Noble Truth, and some chapters regarding the Eightfold Path are put into the Four Noble Truths. The rest of the chapters do not fit neatly into those categories.

The Middle Way is mentioned directly in the book of the aggregates with the sutta SN 22. 90 Channasutta, the book of causation with a series of suttas, including SN 12.15 Kaccānagotta sutta, SN 12.17 Acelakassapasutta, SN 12.18 Timbarukasutta, SN 12. 35 Avijjāpaccayasutta, SN 12. 36 Dutiyaavijjāpaccayasuttand, SN 12. 46 Aññatarabrāhmaṇasutta, SN 12. 47 Jāṇussoṇisutta, SN 12. 48 Lokāyatikasutta, the book of the Path with sutta SN 56.11Dhammacakkappavattanasutta, and the book of the six sense fields with the sutta SN 42.12 Rāsiyasutta. The Middle Way depicted in both SN 42.12 and SN 56.11 is about the Eightfold path to avoid two extremes, consisting of gratification in sensual pleasures and self-mortification. This Middle Way is called majjhimāpaṭipadā. Whenever the Middle Way is mentioned in early Buddhism or Theravada tradition, it often refers to the Eightfold Path, avoiding the two extremes mentioned above. However, the Middle Way is described further in different parts of the Samyutta Nikaya, especially in the Nidānasaṁyutta, and it is discussed at deeper levels below.

Nidānasaṁyutta

The core teaching of this chapter is the twelve links, or dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), and both suttas, the SN 12.1 and the SN 12.2, introduce and analyze each element in the 12-linked chain. Therefore, it is the foundation for understanding the following suttas that present dependent origination in various situations. In the SN 12.1, the list of the 12-linked chain consists of ignorance (avijjā), choices (saṅkhārā), consciousness (viññāṇa), name and form (nāma-rūpa), six sense bases (saḷāyatana), contact (phassa), sensations (vedanā), cravings (taṇhā), grasping (upādāna), becoming (bhava), rebirth (jāti), old age and death (jarāmaraṇa). Each factor of this chain is the condition for the next factor in the chain. The SN 12.2 sutta analyzes each element in the chain: ignorance refers to not understanding suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the cessation of the suffering path, choices (saṅkhārā) consist of three kinds regarding body, speech, and mind, consciousness (viññāṇa) consisting of six types of consciousnesses regarding eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousness, name and form (nāma-rūpa) with name including sensation, perception, intention, contact, attention, six sense bases (saḷāyatana) consisting of the eye base, the ear base, the nose base, the tongue base, the body base, the mind base, contact (phassa) including eye contact, ear contact, nose contact, tongue contact, body contact, mind contact, sensations (vedanā) with six kinds of sensation based on six senses, cravings (taṇhā) for six categories including six external objects of six senses, grasping (upādāna) with four types consisting of clinging to sensual pleasures, views, precepts and rituals, doctrine of the self, becoming (bhava) including sensual realm, luminous realm, and the formless realm, rebirth (jāti), old age and death (jarāmaraṇa).

Based on the analysis of the factor grasping above, sensual pleasures, precepts, and rituals are two extremes mentioned in the SN 56.11 sutta, and the Middle Way is the solution to detach both. Moreover, views and theories of the self are other extremes mentioned in different

suttas in Nidānasaṁyutta, and the Middle Way is interpreted more deeply based on the twelve-linked chain. The table below lists multiple suttas in this chapter and a pair of extremes to offer a general view of the Middle Way, along with two extremes.

No	Name of suttas	Two extremes
1	SN 12.15 Kaccānagottasutta	Existence (Eternalism) vs. Non-existence (Nihilism)
2	SN 12.17 Acelakassapasutta	Suffering is experienced by a person who does the deed (eternalism) vs Suffering is experienced by a person who does not do the deed that is performed by another one. (annihilationism)
3	SN 12.18 Timbaruka Sutta	The sensation, including pleasure and pain, and the person who experiences it is the same one vs The sensation, including pleasure and pain and the person who experiences are different.
4	SN 12.35 Avijjāpaccayasutta	The soul and the body are the same but the soul and the body are not the same.
5	SN 12.36 Dutiyaavijjāpaccayasutta	The soul and the body are the same but the soul and the body are not the same.
6	SN 12.46 Aññatarabrāhmaṇasutta	The same person experiences the fruit of actions vs The different person experiences the fruit of action from another one.
7	SN 12.47 Jāṇussoṇisutta	Everything exists vs Everything does not exist

8	SN 12.48 Lokāyatikasutta	Everything exists vs Everything does not exist Everything is one vs. everything is separate

Figure1: The table of sutta regarding extremes

This table shows the general views about multiple extremes in each sutta, but all of them are categorized into two groups of clinging: views and doctrines of the self. The Middle Way is the antidote to those clinging, but the interpretation of the Middle Way is not obvious because the suttas simply repeat how the twelve links operate along with the emphasis on one or several factors in the chain. Probably, extremes at that time were common thoughts in Ancient Indian philosophy, so Buddha stressed the practices instead of further explanations about them. However, it leads people in the contemporary world to not understand extremes and the Middle Way besides multiple barriers like time, languages, cultures, perceptions, and conceptions. Therefore, many contemporary scholars think the Middle Way in terms of dealing with two extremes in this chapter is more philosophical than practical, but those extremes still belong to the grasping factor. It implies that if people do not comprehend and detach to extremes, they do not liberate themselves from the samsara. Therefore, the Middle Way in this chapter is not only philosophical but also feasible. In addition, several suttas located in different parts of the Samyutta Nikayas bridge gaps in the misunderstandings of extremes and the Middle Way, but they are not mentioned directly to support the comprehension of the Middle Way. Therefore, this thesis uses several suttas in this chapter and other parts to elaborate further on the Middle Way

and extremes in Kaccānagotta sutta and compare with the Middle Way in Lankavatara sutra in the Mahayana tradition.

Bhadantácariya Buddhaghosa

Buddhaghosa presents a systematic guide to liberation through morality, concentration, and wisdom. He defines the Middle Way as the Noble Eightfold Path, steering clear of sensual indulgence and self-mortification. Right View (sammā ditthi) is crucial, starting the purification process by discerning wholesome/unwholesome actions and maturing into insight into impermanence, non-self, and suffering. This deepened Right View is intrinsically linked to understanding Dependent Origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), which reveals the impersonal, conditioned nature of phenomena through the twelve links. Although not explicitly framed as a triad, his work implies the Middle Way (path), Right View (guide), and Dependent Origination (insight) form the foundation for attaining Nibbāna.

2.2. Secondary sources

Bhikkhu Bodhi

In "The Noble Eightfold Path", Bodhi (2012) describes the Middle Way as the path ending suffering by cultivating wisdom against ignorance, serving as an antidote to sensual overindulgence and asceticism. In "In the Buddha's Words" (2005), he interprets wisdom (panna) as vital for liberation, developed through understanding concepts like Right View, the five aggregates, dependent origination, and the Four Noble Truths. He explicitly links dependent origination to the Middle Way that transcends extremes like existence/non-existence, using the Kaccanagotta Sutta as an illustration. In his Samyutta Nikaya translation (2000), he clarifies the terms atthita (existence) and natthita (non-existence), cautioning against misinterpreting the

Buddha's refusal of ontological concepts and distinguishing atthita (intellectual concept) from bhava (individual existence).

Bhikkhu Thanissiro

In "Beyond All Directions", Thanissaro (2013) analyzes the nature of phenomena as mere combinations of factors, opposing inherent self-belief. He highlights the complexity of the Middle Way, distinguishing between the "Middle of Moderation" (balancing ethics, concentration, wisdom) and the "Middle of Appropriate Attention". Wisdom guides the mind to balance extremes and directs moral/concentration practices. Insight involves detaching from attachments to self and world. In "Handful of Leaves, Volume III", the author (2017) emphasizes the Kaccanagotta Sutta's Right View role: observing arising/ceasing to detach from all dhammas, noting thematic similarities with the Puppha Sutta regarding the definition of the world.

Kalupahana

In his work on Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika, Kalupahana (1991) strongly argues against viewing Nāgārjuna's philosophy as nihilism. He contends it's rooted in Early Buddhism, where emptiness signifies dependent arising – a way to detach from metaphysical extremes or fixed views. He stresses that emptiness aims to abandon views, warning that clinging to emptiness itself leads to misinterpretation. Kalupahana highlights the Kaccanagotta Sutta's profound impact on Nāgārjuna, suggesting the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā is essentially an interpretation of this sutta. The core philosophy is dependent arising, used to counter wrong views by demonstrating the lack of inherent existence and elucidating the Right View.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Interpreting the Kaccānagotta Sutta in "Beyond the Self", Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh (2009) explains Right View as leading the Middle Way, ultimately meaning the non-existence of

all views from the ultimate truth perspective. He states perception, where perceiver and perceived are inseparable, is the foundation of views, and incorrect perceptions of permanence lead to clinging to extremes like "existence" and "nonexistence," especially concerning the self. He explains that dependent co-arising encompasses everything. While being or non-being applies to the phenomenal world (lokadhatu), all is undifferentiated in the dharmadhatu. Practicing mindfulness reveals the twelve links with wisdom; dependent co-arising is termed emptiness, signifying freedom from conceptions and attachments.

Dalai Lama

In "The Middle Way: Faith Grounded in Reason", the Dalai Lama (2004) presents the Middle Way, rooted in Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka, as transcending eternalism and nihilism by recognizing the interdependence of all phenomena. He emphasizes the inseparable link between emptiness (śūnyatā – the lack of intrinsic, independent essence) and dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda – conventional truth). Understanding this, based on the two truths doctrine, requires analytical reasoning (Nalanda tradition) rather than blind faith. This philosophical view is practical, providing the foundation for compassion, renunciation, and wisdom cultivation, integrating meditative practice with rigorous reasoning as seen in Tsongkhapa's Three Principal Aspects of the Path.

Suzuki

In "Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra" , Suzuki (1998) presents Buddhist awakening centered on Mind-Only (cittamātra), asserting phenomena arise solely from consciousness without external reality. Experience is constructed via the storehouse consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). False discrimination (vikalpa) imposes illusory dualistic categories (self/other, being/non-being). Realizing emptiness (śūnyatā) – that all dharmas lack inherent self-nature

(svabhāva) because they arise dependently – leads to non-duality, where reality is a seamless whole beyond concepts. Self-realization (pratyātmavedya) is the culmination: a direct, non-conceptual experience of truth transcending language, uprooting karmic tendencies.

Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro

In "The Island", Pasanno & Amaro (2020) highlight the Kaccanagotta Sutta (SN 12.15) as foundational for understanding the Middle Way and Right View. This sutta articulates a stance avoiding eternalism (permanent self) and annihilationism (denial of continuity). Instead of affirming/denying existence, the Buddha uses dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) – phenomena arise/cease conditionally, without intrinsic substance. This is the Middle Way: a departure from ontological assertions. Right view (sammā-ditthi) is thus experiential insight into conditionality, dismantling identity attachment. They also interpret Nibbāna's non-locality as an unconditioned dimension transcending spatial/temporal boundaries, reflecting cessation of conditioned supports.

Florin Giripescu Sutton

In his study of the Lankāvatāra Sūtra, Sutton (1991) argues against Suzuki's interpretation, positing the sūtra offers an epistemological critique of conceptual thought rather than metaphysical idealism. He suggests concepts like mind-only (cittamātra) and Buddha-nature (tathāgatagarbha) are pedagogical tools guiding practitioners beyond dualistic thinking, not literal truths. Sutton emphasizes the sūtra's rejection of fixed views and its focus on the transformation of consciousness (parāvṛtti) towards non-dual awareness. He connects its dialectical logic such as tetralemma to Madhyamaka, suggesting it advances a pragmatic path aimed at awakening, positioning it as foundational for Zen by bridging critical inquiry and meditative practice

Paul Fuller

In "The Notion of Ditthi in Theravāda Buddhism", Fuller (2005) presents wrong-view (micchā-ditthi) and right-view (sammā-diṭṭhi) not just as opposing doctrines but as distinct cognitive/ethical modes. Wrong views (eternalism, annihilationism, etc.) are marked by attachment and craving, functioning as fetters. Right view is grounded in ethical clarity, detachment, and experiential insight, affirming moral causality and the impermanent, non-self nature of phenomena. He distinguishes mundane right view (supporting ethics) from supramundane right view (enabling liberation via seeing dependent origination). Right view's function is transformative, dissolving attachments and fostering conditions for enlightenment within the Middle Way framework, ultimately transcending even Buddhist teachings themselves

Stephen Laumakis

In "An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy", Laumakis (2008) presents the Middle Way (majjhima paṭipadā) as foundational across ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological levels. Ethically, it's the Noble Eightfold Path avoiding sensual indulgence and asceticism. Metaphysically, it avoids eternalism (unchanging self) and annihilationism (denial of continuity) through the doctrine of dependent origination (paticca samuppāda), affirming interdependent arising without inherent existence. Epistemologically, it promotes inquiry based on experience and critical reflection, resisting dogma and skepticism, aligning with the Kalama Sutta. He also highlights Nāgārjuna's concept of emptiness (śūnyatā) as the rigorous philosophical expression of the Middle Way, deconstructing conceptual extremes

Zhihua Yao

In "Nonexistent Objects in Buddhist Philosophy", Yao (2020) positions Nāgārjuna's philosophy as avoiding metaphysical realism and nihilism. Nāgārjuna equates dependent

origination (pratītyasamutpāda) with emptiness, meaning phenomena are causally conditioned and lack inherent existence (svabhāva). Yao emphasizes Nāgārjuna's critique of intrinsic nature itself, arguing truly self-existent things wouldn't arise from causes. Crucially, even emptiness is presented as empty – a self-negating concept functioning as a method to deconstruct all fixed views, rather than an ultimate truth. The Middle Way is thus a philosophical method rejecting ontological absolutism, affirming conventional reality while denying ultimate inherent grounding

Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw

In "Knowing and Seeing", the Sayadaw (2003) explains the interplay of right view, knowing, seeing, and wisdom (paññā) as key to meditative realization in Theravāda. Right view (sammā-ditthi) isn't just doctrinal correctness but experiential understanding emerging from direct insight. This is cultivated via discerning materiality and mentality and observing dependent origination. "Knowing" involves recognizing ultimate phenomena (aggregates, elements), while "seeing" is the deep realization of their impermanence, suffering, and non-self (anicca, dukkha, anattā). Wisdom arises when discerning reality directly, devoid of conceptual overlays, stemming from purified concentration (samādhi) and tested experientially. Seeing the Four Noble Truths is wisdom's culmination

Leigh Brasington

In "Dependent Origination and Emptiness", Brasington (2021) defines the Middle Way precisely via Nāgārjuna: "Whatever is dependently arisen, that is empty; and that is the Middle Way". This avoids eternalism and nihilism. Emptiness (śūnyatā) isn't a void but the lack of intrinsic essence in phenomena due to their dependent origination (paticcasamuppāda). Thus, the Middle Way transcends dualistic views. Understanding dependent origination reveals emptiness, undermines clinging, and opens the path to liberation. He treats the Kaccanagotta Sutta (SN

12.15) as foundational, showing how it rejects "existence" and "non-existence" for an understanding rooted in conditional arising and ceasing, prefiguring emptiness.

Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai

In the chapter "The Theory of Mind-Only and the Real State of Things" in "The Teaching of Buddha", Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (2005) mentions reality through the Mahāyāna Mind-Only (Cittamātra) doctrine. It posits phenomena originate from mind as mental constructs without independent existence. Suffering stems from mistaking these projections as real; enlightenment comes from recognizing their emptiness and interdependence. Dualistic distinctions (self/other, existence/non-existence) are illusions. The Buddha teaches the Middle Way to transcend affirmation/negation, aligning with emptiness (śūnyatā) and non-duality. This insight dissolves grasping/aversion. Critiquing attachment even to concepts like enlightenment, it advocates for recognizing the mind's true nature.

Mark Siderits

In "Buddhism as Philosophy", Siderits (2007) argues for approaching Buddhism philosophically due to its argumentative structure. He explores connections between emptiness (śūnyatā), dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), Yogācāra idealism, and the Middle Way. He highlights Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka view: phenomena are empty because dependently arisen, lacking intrinsic nature (svabhāva); this defines the Middle Way avoiding eternalism/nihilism. He contrasts this with Yogācāra's critique of the external world as mental representation (mind-only/cittamātra). Both schools share the soteriological aim of dissolving clinging; Madhyamaka deconstructs views, Yogācāra offers phenomenological psychology, both grounded in dependent origination's logic

Noa Ronkin

In her chapter in "Buddhist philosophy: essential readings", Ronkin (2009) interprets the Kaccānagotta Sutta as key to the Buddha's metaphysics, contrasting it with later Abhidhamma scholasticism. She highlights its use of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) as an alternative to the existence/non-existence (atthi/natthi) dichotomy – the extremes the Middle Way transcends. This sutta presents a subtle ontology, neither affirming nor denying ultimate realities, rejecting fixed categories for a dynamic, process-oriented view. Ronkin argues this anticipates Madhyamaka and is non-substantialist but not anti-metaphysical, reframing inquiry via causal interdependence to align metaphysical reflection with soteriological aims

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda

In "The Law of Dependent Arising" Vol. 2, Nāṇananda (2015) interprets the Kaccānagotta Sutta's Middle Way primarily as a dynamic cognitive principle, going beyond behavioral codes. The Buddha's rejection of "everything exists" (eternalism) and "nothing exists" (nihilism) in favor of Dependent Arising (paṭicca samuppāda) represents the true Middle Way. This approach avoids metaphysical speculation, centering on the experiential unfolding of phenomena and how clinging to being/non-being perpetuates saṁsāra. Linking this to discourses like the Bahiya Sutta, he underscores how direct, non-conceptual awareness dissolves illusions of substantial self/world, making the Middle Way a radical reorientation of perception.

Peter Harvey

In his chapter in "A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy", Harvey (2013) argues that conditioned co-arising (paṭiccasamuppāda) constitutes the Buddha's Middle Way between metaphysical extremes. He uses the Kaccanagotta Sutta (SN 12.15) to support this. Conditioned co-arising provides a dynamic account where mental (nāma) and bodily (rūpa) processes are mutually dependent events, not substances. This explains continuity within life and across

rebirths without an eternal self, thus avoiding eternalism and annihilationism. The Kaccāyanagotta Sutta reinforces this by rejecting absolute existence/non-existence claims, focusing instead on the conditional nature of phenomena revealed through arising and cessation.

Rupert Gethin

In "The Foundations of Buddhism", Gethin (1998) presents the Middle Way as a central, multifaceted principle. Initially introduced via the first sermon, it denotes the Noble Eightfold Path avoiding sensual indulgence and self-mortification (ethics, mental discipline, wisdom). Philosophically, in the context of no-self (anattā), it rejects eternalism and annihilationism, using dependent arising (paticcasamuppāda) to show a dynamic, contingent process. This perspective extends to cosmology. In Mahāyāna, particularly Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka, the Middle Way equates to insight into emptiness (śūnyatā), demonstrating the emptiness of all phenomena via dependent arising. Gethin shows it's a profound ontological/epistemological stance across Buddhism

Eviatar Shulman

In his chapter in "Madhyamaka and Yogācāra: Allies or Rivals?", Shulman (2015) questions the traditional sharp distinction between Madhyamaka (Nāgārjuna) and Yogācāra (Vasubandhu). He suggests their founders might be less opposed than later traditions claim. While Nāgārjuna is known for emptiness and Vasubandhu for mind-only, both aimed to dismantle fixed views. Shulman points out Nāgārjuna avoids claiming ultimate reality for the mind, while Vasubandhu's writings imply mind and objects are empty. Both use philosophy and meditation to understand emptiness and attain liberation, suggesting they offer complementary perspectives on the Middle Way

Robert M. Ellis

In "The Buddha's Middle Way", Ellis (2019) identifies problems in common interpretations of the Middle Way, including ontological misunderstandings and a flawed grasp of skepticism. He proceeds to explain the Middle Way primarily through the framework of the Eightfold Path. Furthermore, Ellis analyzes the concept based on various other factors and principles within Buddhist thought. Ultimately, he recommends alternative, potentially more accurate, explanations and interpretations of what the Middle Way entails, addressing the issues he initially raised

David Burton

In "Is Madhyamaka Buddhism Really the Middle Way?", Burton (2001) tackles the critique that Madhyamaka's emptiness (śūnyatā) implies nihilism. Referencing Nāgārjuna, he clarifies emptiness signifies the absence of inherent, independent being (svabhāva), not non-existence. This places Madhyamaka firmly in the "Middle Way," avoiding eternalism and annihilationism. Dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) is central: phenomena arise conditionally, making their existence contingent, not autonomous. Burton argues this view is foundational, not destructive, to Buddhist goals, as it allows for change (like the self) based on conditions, supporting the possibility of enlightenment and ethical cultivation

Eviatar Shulman

In "Early Meanings of Dependent-Origination", Shulman (2008) challenges the view of dependent origination (pratītya-samutpāda) as a universal ontology. Based on early texts like the Kaccānagotta Sutta, he argues its original focus was narrower: psychological and soteriological processes related to the self's construction/deconstruction. It emphasized conditioned subjective experience over objective existence. The Middle Way – rejecting existence/non-existence – was central to this framework for articulating right view (sammā-ditthi). Dependent origination

served as a heuristic to transcend ontological dualism, functioning as a dynamic, introspective tool rather than a cosmological explanation

Dan Arnold

In the article "Nāgārjuna's 'Middle Way': A Non-Eliminative Understanding of Selflessness", Arnold (2010) examines Nāgārjuna's critique of essentialist causal explanations. Nāgārjuna's rejection of arising from self, other, both, or neither (MMK 1.1) asserts the Middle Way. This avoids eternalism/nihilism by denying inherent existence (svabhāva) while preserving conventional validity. Arnold presents this Middle Way as non-eliminative: it doesn't deny existence but claims entities exist only dependently (pratītyasamutpāda), without intrinsic essence. This provides a sophisticated view of selflessness (anātman) where the self is conventionally designated, not outright denied. Emptiness (śūnyatā) recognizes this interdependent lack of inherent nature

Jane Compson & Lynette Monteiro

In the article "Still Exploring the Middle Path: A Response to Commentaries", Compson & Monteiro (2016) defend their concept of a "middle path" for mindfulness practice against critiques. They argue for an approach that neither fully merges mindfulness with religious Buddhism nor strips it entirely of its ethical/philosophical roots for secular use. They contend that core Buddhist teachings, especially the Eightfold Path, represent a universal, lawful structure of reality, not just cultural constructs. This counters views of secular mindfulness as "stealth Buddhism" or ethically shallow. They suggest mindfulness can be practiced meaningfully outside religious contexts while retaining transformative potential.

Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury

In "Unfolding Dependent Origination: A Psychological Analysis..." (2022), Chowdhury explores dependent origination (paticcasamuppāda) as both metaphysical and psychological. Using Pāli/Sanskrit sources including Nāgārjuna, he presents the twelve links as mapping mental affliction rooted in ignorance (avijjā), craving (tanha), and clinging (upādāna), fueling the cycle of suffering. He stresses the psychological impact: understanding dependent origination reveals how afflictive states arise. Linking it to Nāgārjuna's emptiness (śūnyatā) and non-self (anattā) illustrates the absence of intrinsic essence, making dependent origination a therapeutic tool for mental liberation.

Jackson Cole Macor

In the article " Not Even Absent: Dependent Origination, Emptiness, and the Two Truths in the Thought of Nāgārjuna, Macor (2024) critically examines Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka, arguing it's fundamentally non-assertive and lacks constructive metaphysics. He clarifies dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) ironically signifies non-origination (anutpāda), demonstrating the absence of intrinsic nature (svabhāva). Emptiness (śūnyatā) thus lacks referential content, as no entity possesses the intrinsic nature emptiness would negate. The Two Truths doctrine isn't used to preserve metaphysics but reinforces that conceptual designations lack ultimate grounding. Nāgārjuna's refusal to assert a thesis stems from a commitment to critique, foreclosing metaphysical theorizing by exposing the incoherence of ontological claims

Zhang, J., Ping, X., Chen, W., & Dong, D.

In the article " Beyond substantiality and illusion: the problem of the self in Buddhist constructivism", Zhang et al. (2024) critiques substance theory (stable self) and illusion theory (self as fiction) regarding the self. Drawing on Buddhist concepts like the five aggregates and the Middle Way, the authors propose a constructivist model. They argue the self is neither

substantial nor mere illusion but a dynamic, emergent process shaped by interdependent conditions. This view integrates first-person contemplative insights with third-person scientific observation, advocating for combining Eastern meditative traditions with Western cognitive science. They conclude this offers a more nuanced understanding of identity with implications for psychology, ethics, and consciousness studies

Rajlakshmi Kalita

In "External World in the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna: A Study," Kalita (2015) explores Nāgārjuna's stance on the external world via Mādhyamika. Nāgārjuna uses emptiness (śūnyatā) and dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) to critique metaphysical absolutism and essentialism. Kalita argues he doesn't deny the external world but reframes it as conditionally real, lacking inherent/independent essence. Using the fourfold negation (catuṣkoṭi), he deconstructs rigid concepts, affirming a middle path (madhyamā pratipad) between eternalism and nihilism. This rejects substantialist/annihilationist views, emphasizing phenomena exist conventionally, not ultimately. Nāgārjuna provides a sophisticated framework against reified reality notions

Koji Tanaka

In the article "How Can Buddhists Prove That Non-Existent Things Do Not Exist?" Tanaka (2021) addresses a logical challenge: How can Buddhists argue against the existence of things (like a fixed self) if Indian logic forbids arguing about non-existent entities?. He explains that Buddhist thinkers, especially Madhyamaka philosophers, employ the prasanga method (reductio ad absurdum). Instead of making direct claims about non-existence, they demonstrate the logical contradictions inherent in their opponents' assertions of existence. This allows them to

undermine concepts like inherent existence without violating logical rules by positing non-existent subjects.

Sajad Dehghanzadeh and Robab Habibi

In "The Phenomenon of Mind in Madhyamika Philosophy From Illusion to Reality!", the Dehghanzadeh & Habibi (2025) explore the Madhyamika view of mind using emptiness (śūnyatā) and the Middle Way. They argue the mind, like all phenomena, lacks inherent existence – it's ultimately illusory but conventionally valid. Drawing on Nāgārjuna's two truths (conventional/ultimate), they explain Madhyamika avoids eternalism and nihilism, embodying the Middle Way. This path deconstructs extremes; true wisdom (prajñā) arises from direct realization of emptiness, not mental cognition. They highlight the non-duality of samsāra/nirvāṇa as expressions of the same empty reality, making the understanding of mind soteriological

Mattia Salvini

In "The Nidānasamyukta and the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā", Salvini (2011) examines connections between early Buddhist texts and Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka. Focusing on the Nidanasamyukta and Kātyāyanavavāda Sūtra, he argues these non-Mahāyāna sources significantly influenced Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK), especially regarding dependent origination and the rejection of extremes like existence (asti) and non-existence (nāsti). He contends the MMK's arguments are rooted in earlier canonical traditions, supported by Candrakīrti's commentaries quoting these sutras. Salvini challenges placing Nāgārjuna solely within Mahāyāna, suggesting broader Buddhist continuity and the value of studying Madhyamaka alongside early teachings

Tiantian Cai

In the article "Unraveling Prapañca: A Yogaacara Examination of Consciousness,

Language, and Liberation in the Lankavatara Sutra", Cai (2024) explores prapañca (conceptual proliferation) within Yogācāra epistemology, using the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra (which integrates Yogācāra/Madhyamaka). Cai analyzes how prapañca underlies subject-object duality, linguistic abstraction, and suffering (samsāra). It's presented not just as error but a fundamental process structuring dualistic cognition and afflicted consciousness. Yogācāra links prapañca to language and mental defilements, generating karma via conceptualization (vikalpa). Liberation requires ceasing prapañca, coinciding with realizing emptiness (śūnyatā) and non-duality. Overcoming prapañca involves transcending false ontology and the cognitive-linguistic structures obscuring direct perception.

Jenny Hung

In "Is Emptiness Non-Empty? Jizang's Conception of Buddha-Nature", Hung (2025) argues the Chinese scholar Jizang reconciles universal emptiness with a non-empty Buddha-nature by redefining the latter through the Middle Way. Instead of a fixed essence, Jizang sees Buddha-nature as a dynamic spiritual condition avoiding ontological reification and nihilistic negation. He uses the distinction between intrinsic and conditional eternality, affirming Buddha-nature as conditionally eternal, manifesting via causes and conditions as the dharma body (dharmakāya). This preserves emptiness while emphasizing Buddha-nature's transformative, pedagogical role, making the Middle Way central to ensuring conceptual flexibility and encouraging beings toward enlightenment via the One Vehicle doctrine.

Zelin Zhao

In the article "The core idea, theoretical doubts, and re-understanding of the theory of sunyatā in Madhyamaka Philosophy", Zhao (2025) re-examines Madhyamaka emptiness (śūnyatā), highlighting its dual role as philosophical insight and practical guide for relieving

suffering. Critiquing overemphasis on abstract theory, Zhao calls for integrating lived experience. He identifies the Middle Way (madhyamā-mārga) – avoiding eternalism and nihilism by revealing interdependent, non-inherent nature via Nāgārjuna's dialectic – as śūnyatā's foundational logic. This path transcends binary thinking, fostering wisdom and psychological liberation. Zhao claims the Middle Way involves practices transforming perception and reducing existential distress

Alexander Wyne

In "Proto-Madhyamaka in the Pali Canon Revisited", Wynne (2024) challenges the narrative of Madhyamaka emerging solely as a Mahāyāna innovation. He traces its concepts to early texts like the Atthakavagga and Kaccānagotta Sutta in the Pali Canon. These texts show a radical apophatic tendency – rejecting fixed views, emphasizing non-conceptual awareness, discouraging doctrinal attachment – anticipating Madhyamaka's focus on emptiness (śūnyatā) and the middle path. Wynne proposes these ideas were preserved via the western Kaccāna lineage and later reformulated in Gandhāra as Prajñāpāramitā literature, suggesting continuity between early anti-essentialism and Nāgārjuna's systematic Madhyamaka.

Dilip Loundo

In the article "The 'Two Truths' Doctrine (Satyadvaya) and the Nature of Upaya in Nāgārjuna", Loundo (2016) examines how Nāgārjuna's two truths doctrine – conventional (samvrti-satya) and ultimate (paramārtha-satya) – enables the Mahāyāna concept of upāya (skillful means). This dual framework allows coherent guidance aligned with liberation. Responding to Sarvāstivāda essentialism, Nāgārjuna emphasized emptiness (śūnyatā) and conceptual constructedness. The Middle Way is embedded in the interplay between the two truths, avoiding eternalism and nihilism. Conventional truth permits upāya, language, ethics,

while ultimate truth points to realizing emptiness, making the doctrine central to Nāgārjuna's Middle Way.

Santhad Chanthathong

In "The Significance of the Right View (Sammāditthi) in Theravada Buddhism", Chanthathong (2021) explores Right View's foundational role as the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path and key to wisdom. It's essential for understanding the Four Noble Truths and navigating the Middle Way (majjhimā paṭipadā), which avoids sensual indulgence and self-mortification. Within the threefold training (Trisikkhā), Right View belongs to wisdom (paññā), guiding virtue and concentration development. It's classified as mundane (lokiya - belief in karma) and supramundane (lokuttara - direct insight into Four Noble Truths leading to liberation). Cultivation is supported by good friends, listening to teachings, and reflection

Jones

In "Dependent Arising", Jones (2004) interprets dependent origination (pratītya-samutpāda) as the Buddha's core awakening insight and the philosophical expression of the Middle Way. It explains suffering's arising/ceasing via conditioned processes (twelve links), acting as a meditative method and phenomenological description of samsāra, rather than metaphysics/science. The Middle Way, seen in texts like Kaccānagotta Sutta, avoids eternalism/annihilationism, revealing impermanence and non-self. Jones connects this to Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka equation of dependent origination with emptiness (śūnyatā). He examines various interpretations but cautions against reducing it to metaphors obscuring its soteriological function

Thesis:

Ven. Huynh Thi Ha Vy

In the thesis "Śūnyatā from Madhyamaka to Early Yogācāra Philosophy", Venerable Vy (2015) explores emptiness (śūnyatā) development, arguing Madhyamaka and Early Yogācāra offer complementary, not opposed, approaches. Madhyamaka (Nāgārjuna) emphasizes absolute emptiness via dependent origination and the two truths, using dialectics. Yogācāra elaborates emptiness via psychological analysis – storehouse consciousness (ālayavijñāna), three natures (trisvabhāva) – revealing how consciousness projects illusions. Vy contends Yogācāra's positive terms extend Madhyamaka's negations via cognitive transformation. Both confirm the Middle Way (Madhyamā-pratipad) avoiding nihilism/eternalism, with practical application in meditation for liberation.

Bhikkhuni Tran Thi Vy

In the thesis "A Study of the Concept of Right View (Sammā-diṭṭhi) in Theravāda Buddhism", Tran Thi Vy (2017) analyzes Right View as foundational to the Noble Eightfold Path and integral to the Middle Way. Exploring Pali Canon roots, it identifies Right View with correctly understanding kamma and the Four Noble Truths. It's classified as mundane (lokiya - ethical discernment) and supramundane (lokuttara - spiritual insight). The thesis argues Right View functions as compass and gateway, orienting practitioners by avoiding indulgence/self-mortification extremes, directly connecting it to the Middle Way (majjhimā patipadā). Right View embodies the Middle Way's balanced, non-dual essence rooted in direct understanding

Bhikkhuni Tran Thi Binh

In the dissertation " An Analysis on the Paths to Attaining Enlightenment in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism", Tran Thi Binh (2018) compares Theravāda and Mahāyāna paths, emphasizing the Middle Way. In Theravāda, it's the Eightfold Path (morality, concentration, wisdom) avoiding sensual indulgence/self-mortification, leading to Arahantship. In Mahāyāna,

though less explicit practically, it's deeply embedded philosophically in emptiness (śūnyatā) and non-duality (Nāgārjuna, Lańkāvatāra Sūtra), guiding the Bodhisattva ideal between existence/non-existence. Binh interprets the Middle Way as both moral practice and metaphysical insight into reality's non-substantial nature, unifying both schools' goals and applicable in monastic/lay contexts.

Patrick Kearney

Kearney (2002) interprets the Kaccānagotta Sutta's Middle Way as rejecting metaphysical extremes of existence (atthitā) and non-existence (natthita). He highlights the Buddha's teaching of dependent arising (paṭiccasamuppāda): phenomena, including the self, arise and cease due to conditions, lacking inherent essence. What we call "self" is a process, an interplay of changing factors. Kearney sees this insight as challenging clinging to the self, showing liberation lies in seeing through its conditionality, not affirming/denying selfhood. For Kearney, the sutta encapsulates the Buddha's vision: freedom through understanding the dependent, empty nature of fixed identities

Beier Wang

In the article " Conceptualization and ‘World Making’: A Study on Prapañca as an Imprint in Yogācāra Treatises” Wang (2022) investigates prapañca (conceptual proliferation) in Yogācāra epistemology. Wang argues the perceived external world isn't objective reality but a subjective construct formed by mental imprints (vāsanās), discrimination, and language. Tracing prapañca's evolution, Wang notes its increasing link to linguistic activity and role in forming intersubjective experiences. The Yogācāra concept nimitta-nāma-vikalpa-vyavahāra-prapañca-vāsanā illustrates how habitual conceptualizations create the illusion of a

shared, stable world. Mental/verbal constructs obscure direct experience, reinforcing samsaric misperceptions. Yogācāra reconceptualizes world-making via an introspective cognitive model

Dr. Ramala Sarma

In "Reality is Experiential: A Buddhist Analysis", Sarma (2022) posits the Buddhist view of reality as inherently experiential, inseparable from the act of experiencing. Examining Early Buddhism (reality as impermanent, dependently arisen via paṭiccasamuppāda), Yogācāra (mind-only/cittamātra, no independent external objects), and Madhyamaka (phenomena empty/śūnya of inherent essence, rejecting extremes), Sarma argues they converge despite doctrinal differences. All agree conceptual/linguistic descriptions are insufficient; true understanding comes from direct experience, not abstract theory. Buddhist emphasis is on experiential insight as the path to liberation.

Richard H. Jones

In "On What is Real in Nāgārjuna's Middle Way", Jones (2020) contests interpreting Nāgārjuna as an ontological nihilist. While Nāgārjuna denies self-existent reality (svabhāva), Jones argues this isn't total negation. Instead, Nāgārjuna affirms "that-ness" (tattva), a phenomenological existence grounded in dependent origination. By rejecting eternalism/annihilationism, Nāgārjuna articulates a "Middle Way": things are empty of inherent essence yet function conventionally. Jones clarifies emptiness isn't absolute nothingness but insight into phenomena's conditioned, relational nature, undermining reified views and enabling transformation/liberation, providing a coherent, non-essentialist framework.

Dr. Banajit Sharma

In the "Indian Nihilism: An Exposition of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy", Sharma (2019) contrasts Nāgārjuna's approach with Western nihilism. Nāgārjuna uses śūnyatā (emptiness) and

pratītyasamutpāda (dependent origination) to argue phenomena lack intrinsic essence (svabhāva) and arise interdependently, aiming to dismantle conceptual extremes, such as eternalism and annihilationism via a "Middle Way". Sharma stresses Nāgārjuna's method is dialectical and therapeutic, designed to liberate minds from fixed views, not advocate metaphysical nothingness. Nāgārjuna's thought represents a sophisticated, non-essentialist epistemology, not a nihilistic rejection of reality.

To sum up, all studies examined above focus on analyzing rejections extremes, the right view, and the unchanging self, but they do not explain that ignorance-based contact is the cause that leads to cravings and clinging to the self and views. Most of them pay attention to the object grasped and interactions of six sense bases, and six external objects, six consciousnesses. In addition, they do not compare with the Middle Way in Mahayana tradition or, in particular, Buddhist scriptures. The philosophy of the Middle Way is mentioned implicitly in many places in the Lankavatara sutra, but it seems like no scholars have researched it and compared it with the Middle Way in Theravada tradition. Therefore, this thesis bridges the gaps mentioned above to have a broad picture of the Middle Way in both traditions.

3. Chapter Three: *Finding*

3.1. The Middle Way in Kaccānagotta Sutta

3.1.1 History

The term Kaccānagotta of the title refers to the name of a disciple of Buddha. The Kaccānagotta sutta, a small sutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya in the Pali canon, has the parallel version SA301 found in Samyukta Agama in the Chinese version translated from Sanskrit. In the Pali canon, many scholars translated Kaccānagotta sutta into English, but this research uses the English translation of Bhikkhu Sujato as the main source to analyze and compare.

3.1.2 Summary

In the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Sujato, the Kaccānagotta sutta, taught by the Buddha at Savatthi, is the lecture explaining the right view and the Middle Way based on the twelve links. After Venerable Kaccana asks the Buddha about the definition of the right view, the Buddha asserts that two opposing concepts, including existence and non-existence, are what most people in this world depend on. Moreover, the Buddha states that the notion of existence or non-existence does not happen once people with the right understanding observe the beginning or cessation of the world. According to the Buddha, the right view refers to the observation of the appearance and disappearance of sufferings as beings without cravings, clinging, and attachments to mental states, and potential tendencies. Finally, the Buddha teaches that the Middle Way is an antidote to two extremes, “all exists” and “ all does not exist,” in accordance with the foundation of the twelve links.

3.1.3 Theme:

The main theme of this discourse emphasizes the role of the right view and teaches the Middle Way by mentioning dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), which avoids a pair of opposing extremes: existence and non-existence. In terms of defining the right view, Buddha states two important aspects to define the right view. First, the Buddha explains that observing with right understanding the nature of arising and ceasing of all phenomena as they are, so the conception regarding the existence and non-existence does not happen. Second, the Buddha also stresses that craving, attachments, and insistence are reasons that lead people to attachments to dualistic extremes. Therefore, when people are not attached to things and mental states, they are not skeptical about the suffering concerning the arising and ceasing phenomena. Furthermore, the Buddha mentions the Middle Way by teaching that the origination of the twelve links is the arising of suffering, and its cessation is the ending of suffering.

3.1.4. Key terms

Besides the words regarding dependent arising, this discourse has crucial key words that influence our understanding of it. According to the Pali dictionary online or ReadingFaithfully.org (n.d), the table below lists essential words in English and Pali.

English	**Pali**
Existence	atthitañceva
Non-existence	natthitañca
All exist	Sabbamatthī’ti
All does not exist	Sabbaṁ natthī’ti

Right view	sammādiṭṭhi
Right understanding	sammappaññāya

Figure 2: The table of terms in Kaccānagotta sutta

3.1.5 Interpretation:

3.1.5.1 Context

This sutta is set in Sāvatthī, where a dialogue unfolds between the Buddha and the Venerable Mahākaccāna or Kaccāna (Bodhi, 2003), one of the Buddha's ten foremost disciples. Renowned for his exceptional skill in doctrinal exposition, Mahākaccāna was especially adept at interpreting and articulating the nuanced meanings of the Buddha's teachings

3.1.5.1 Analysis

As mentioned above, most people think of the Middle Way as a tool to avoid overwhelming sensual pleasures and asceticism, or the Middle Way as finding the midpoint to balance between two extremes. However, the Middle Way articulated in the *Kaccānagotta Sutta* presents a distinct perspective rooted in ontology. Although it is explicitly described in the Kaccānagotta Sutta, some aspects of this discourse remain unclear. Therefore, the following analysis will examine three key aspects of this sutta to elucidate how the Middle Way functions within its doctrinal context

This section will explain how most people are attached to a pair of opposing extremes: existence and non-existence, by analyzing how the conceptions of existence and non-existence are generated. In terms of their appearance, both notions are created via the interactions between the six sense bases and their corresponding objects. In addition, consciousnesses created by the five senses and their objects are objects for the sixth sense or mind, so this process leads to the appearance of ideas, knowledge, and notions regarding perceived form and mental objects. In

Dependent Origination, these interactions give rise to the following chains: contacts, sensation, cravings, insistence, becoming, and others. Six consciousnesses that result from the meeting of the six sense bases and objects are linked to cravings, so it leads to four kinds of insistence: clinging to sensual pleasures, views, precepts, and rituals, and the doctrine of the self (Sujato, 2018). Clinging is a high-intensity craving compared to the craving chain. Plus, according to the SN 22. 81 Pālileyyasutta, Sujato (2018) translates the Samyutta Nikaya that contact with ignorance, which refers to the illusion of the self, the possession of the ego, and myself, is the condition for the arising of cravings. In other words, contact without ignorance is the condition to end the cravings in the twelve links.

In the five aggregates, all views regarding the universe, including extremes such as notions of existence and nonexistence and theories of the self, are the activities of the five aggregates. This is found in the Sallekha sutta, when Cunda asks the Buddha how to eliminate wrong views regarding the doctrines of the self and the cosmos. According to Sujato (2018), in *MN 8 (Sallekhasutta)*, "truly seeing with right wisdom where they arise, where they settle in, and where they operate as: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.'". In other words, the origin of all misconceptions regarding self and the world roots in the operation of the five aggregates. In the book, Mahāsi Sayādaw (2013) emphasizes, "these wrong views will dominate us if we naïvely regard the five aggregates as our possessions". Wrong views mean views of phenomena regarding the world and the self are not as they are, and wrong views are wrong compared to nibbana or the ultimate truth. Therefore, both notions of existence and non-existence are wrong views because they are only consequences of the activities of the five aggregates. Having mentioned the process of creating notions, the next analysis is about the right view.

This section analyzes two situations that the Buddha mentions to illustrate the Right View. The first situation involves clinging to extremes about the world, specifically notions of existence and non-existence. According to Bodhi (2000), the concept of existence refers to eternalism, which means permanent entities after death, and the concept of nonexistence means annihilationism, which refers to nothingness after death. Therefore, attachments to those extremes cause people not to see the permanence of the world. In the sutta (Sujato, 2018), Buddha says,

> When you truly understand the origin of the world, the concept of non-existence regarding the world does not arise. And when you truly see the cessation of the world with right understanding, the concept of existence regarding the world does not occur.

It means that seeing the causes and conditions underlying the origination and cessation of the world eliminates the attachments to dualistic extremes. However, only observing with right wisdom illuminates the origination and cessation of the world because seeing without right wisdom is observation conditioned by the activities of the five aggregates.

The second situation concerns attachment to the self. It is an incorrect view because it is constructed through the continual activities of the five aggregates. According to the Buddha, when people detach from the self, they can see the arising and passing away of suffering without a doubt, and their knowledge does not depend on others. In this part, the Buddha emphasizes the elimination of attachments to the self, but it is actually about wisdom that is the same solution as the first situation, because only wisdom gets rid of grasping to the self. Clinging to the extremes regarding the world in the first situation and clinging to the self in the second are the activities of the five aggregates. In other words, they are rooted in cravings that are the result of contact (phassa) involving ignorance between the six sense bases, their corresponding objects, and the

six consciousnesses. Therefore, contact with right wisdom not only eliminates the impact of ignorance in the moment but also creates no conditions for the arising of cravings in interactions between the six sense bases, six objects, and six consciousnesses, leading to the cessation of other links in dependent origination.

Both situations reflect the importance of wisdom which is the right view developed by the cultivation of ethics and concentration. According to Bodhi (2005), “right view is twofold: conceptual right view, a clear intellectual grasp of the Dhamma; and experiential right view, the wisdom that directly penetrates the Dhamma” (p. 303). In other words, conceptual right view is based on learning and thinking about Dhamma or Buiddhist scriptures, and experiential right view refers to the direct realization of Dhamma, such as the four Noble Truths and dependent origination. In addition, the conceptual right view is the foundation for developing the experiential right view, as it initiates the Eightfold Path, also known as the Middle Way. When the wisdom is manifested based on the cultivated Eightfold path with conceptual right view, the four Noble Truths, and the twelve links are illuminated. Therefore, there is no self in seeing, hearing, or recognizing, which is found in the Bahiya sutta (Sujato, n.d).

The part explains the meaning of “ all exists “ and “ all does not exist” in the sutta. Everything in the universe always changes in every moment, and is composed of various factors. Stating the existence and non-existence of all things are extremes because they are only conceptions that living beings take a snapshot or perceive any phenomena at a specific time. In addition, the conceptions of phenomena only reflect their surface, so their unrecognized origin and cessation lead to erroneous perception. As depicted above, the perception is the activities of the five aggregates, so it is conditioned by clinging to the self. In other words, the nature of the perceiver and the perceived, or subject and object, is constantly changing, so assertions regarding

concepts of existence and non-existence about the world reflect fixed views of the subject and object. Therefore, the Buddha claims the statements concerning eternalism or nihilism are extreme. Only experiential right view cultivated by the Middle Way illuminates the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates, and the twelve links, which leads to detachment from dualistic extremes. In other words, the observation without grasping the ego and objects is the direct realization of the interdependence of all phenomena, which has no inherent existence.

In this sutta, the Buddha mentions the origination and cessation of Dependent Origination without explicitly addressing its relation to the Middle Way in the avoidance of extremes; therefore, this part explores how the Middle Way is presented. Each factor in the twelve links is a condition for the next factor, and the elimination of only one factor leads to the cessation of the entire cycle. In the Sammāditṭhi Sutta, Sariputta teaches the origination of each link and the Eightfold Path as the method to eliminate each of the twelve links (Sujato, 2018). The nature of each chain is impermanent, but not seeing them with wisdom is the leading cause of continuing the cycle. When ordinary people start the Middle Way with the conceptual right view, they develop wholesomeness instead of wisdom. Once ethics and immersion are developed gradually, it leads to the appearance of wisdom or the experiential right view described above. According to Vasubandhu's treatises (1991), Dependent Origination occurs in every moment, happening continually from timelessness. Therefore, the wisdom developed partially can help practitioners partially weaken the series of continuous cycles of dependent origination. Any clinging to extremes, such as the notion of existence and nonexistence, is based on the operation of dependent origination in every moment. Hence, practicing the Middle Way fully helps people see truly the originating and ceasing of the twelve links, thereby avoiding any attachments to extremes regarding the world or the self.

In summary, the Kaccānagotta Sutta reframes the Middle Way not only as a moderation between extremes of lifestyle but also as a profound ontological path that avoids the dualistic views of existence and non-existence. These views that arise from ignorance and craving are conditioned through the interaction of the six sense bases, consciousness, and the five aggregates. The analysis reveals that all speculative views about the self and the world are dependent constructions rooted in misperception. The Buddha's emphasis on the right view provides the means to see through these fabrications. Thus, the Middle Way serves not only as ethical moderation but also as an insight into reality's impermanence and conditionality. Fully cultivating this path helps practitioners transcend dualistic views and liberation from wrong views regarding the world and ego.

3.2. The Middle Way in the Lankavatara Sutra

3.2.1 History

The exact date of the *Lankavatara Sutra*'s composition remains uncertain due to limited historical evidence, though it predates the first Chinese translation in 443 CE. Tilakaratne (1999) suggests a 2nd–3rd century CE origin, possibly influencing early Madhyamaka thinkers. The text likely evolved over time, as later translations included material absent from earlier versions, indicating a gradual compilation. Emerging later than the *Nikayas* or *Agamas*, the sutra likely took shape around the beginning of the Common Era, reflecting the crystallization of Mahayana thought. It significantly influenced the transmission of Buddhism to China, especially in the development of Zen. According to Suzuki (1998), four Chinese translations of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra were produced between A.D. 420 and 704. Additionally, two Tibetan versions are preserved in the Kanjur: one from Sanskrit and another translated by Chos-grub from

Guṇabhadra's Chinese version. In English, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra has been translated by Suzuki, Cleary, and Red Pine. While Suzuki's version predates the others, it is notable for its extensive commentary and elucidation of Mahāyāna Buddhist terminology and concepts.

3.2.2 Summary:

Chapter 1, titled "Rāvana, Lord of Lanka, Asks for Instruction," Rāvana, the ten-headed king of the Rākṣasas, respectfully invites the Buddha to his jeweled city to reveal the profound truth realized by past Buddhas. The Buddha accepts, and upon arrival, is honored by celestial beings. Rāvana requests the teaching of the Lankāvatāra Sūtra, which transcends conventional doctrines and emphasizes the inmost realization of the mind. Through symbolic visions and discourse, the chapter highlights the illusory nature of reality, culminating in Rāvana's awakening to non-duality and the truth of Mind-only.

Chapter 2, titled Collection of All the Dharmas, expands the foundational teachings offered in Chapter 1 by diving deeply into the conceptual and phenomenological structure of reality. This chapter is framed as a dialogue primarily between the Bodhisattva Mahamati and the Buddha when Mahamati asks profound philosophical questions concerning existence, cognition, perception, and liberation. The chapter aims to analyze conventional and philosophical views and emphasize that all dharmas (phenomena) are manifestations of the mind.

In the section § I, Mahamati praises the Buddha by using verses with poetic metaphors, including comparing the world to dreams and visions that transcend dualistic notions of being and non-being. These praises emphasize the Buddha's enlightenment and freedom from conceptual limitations. In the section § II, Mahamati asks one hundred and eight philosophical and spiritual questions concerning causality, emancipation, perception, and the nature of

enlightenment. These inquiries are meant to guide beings beyond delusion and into self-realization. In the section § III, the Buddha responds by negating the conceptual validity of 108 categories, including birth, causation, mind, and truth, asserting they do not reflect ultimate reality. These negations demonstrate the illusory nature of linguistic and conceptual constructs. In the section § IV, the Buddha explains the rise, function, and cessation of the eight kinds of vijnana (consciousness), which emphasize their interdependent nature and transformation. He distinguishes their functioning in terms of perception and object-discrimination. In section V, seven types of perceived self-nature are described, such as those formed by attachment or imagination, each illustrating different modes of misperceiving reality. These serve to clarify how beings fabricate views of self and existence.

In the section §VI, the Buddha discusses seven interpretations of ultimate reality, contrasting them with erroneous views held by various philosophical schools. He critiques these views for being bound to dualism and misapprehending the true nature of the mind. This section § VII refutes causation theories of other traditions and presents the Mahayana perspective emphasizing ālaya-vijñāna, nirvana, and cittamātra (mind-only). The teaching underscores the need for non-dual insight in Buddhist realization. In the section § VIII, the Bodhisattva is urged to cultivate insight through meditation and self-realization beyond the conceptual realm. This discipline enables the transcendence of dualistic thought and prepares one for Buddhahood.

In section IX, the vijnanas are said to arise from the Alaya like waves from an ocean, symbolizing the transformation of consciousness through karmic activity. The Bodhisattva's training involves realizing this interdependence and overcoming delusion. In the section § X, the Buddha elaborates on mind-only as the foundation of all experiences, stressing that external

phenomena are mere projections. Liberation arises from understanding this truth experientially, not conceptually. The section § XI (a) depicts three aspects of wisdom: imagined, dependent, and perfected, to guide the practitioner in distinguishing deluded perception from ultimate reality. These components represent successive stages in the mental purification process, as outlined in Buddhist practice**.** In the section § XII, the Tathagata (Buddha-body) is realized through transcending conceptual knowledge and actualizing perfected wisdom. This attainment reflects the Bodhisattva's integration into the ultimate nature of Buddhahood. This section § XII uses the metaphor of the hare's horns to illustrate the futility of conceptual speculation about the unmanifest. True insight cannot be obtained through logical reasoning but through direct realization. In the section § XIII, poetic verses emphasize the interrelation of ālaya-vijñāna and mind-only, likening phenomena to illusions and dreams. These verses aim to inspire non-attachment and wisdom.

In the section § XIV, Liberation can occur either instantly or through gradual purification, depending on the practitioner's capacity and karma. Both methods culminate in the same insight into emptiness and non-self. In the section § XV, three forms of Buddha manifestation are described, representing different dimensions of awakened activity. These embody the Buddha's compassion in adapting teachings to sentient beings. In the section § XVI, the Sravaka's realization, though valuable, is limited by attachment to the idea of self-nature. The Mahayana path transcends this by realizing emptiness and mind-only. In section XVII, the ultimate truth is termed "eternal-unthinkable," signifying its inexpressible, non-conceptual nature. It lies beyond the reach of ordinary perception or intellectual analysis. In the section § XVIII, Nirvana is not annihilation but the transformation of ālaya-vijñāna into wisdom. This shift reveals the non-dual and unborn nature of all things. In the section § XIX, the teaching that

"all things are unborn" reflects the doctrine of emptiness and non-origination. Perceived arising is a mental fabrication without a true basis. The section § XX outlines five types of insight, and each represents a stage of increasing wisdom and detachment. These guide the Bodhisattva from conceptual understanding to perfect knowledge. In the section § XXI, verses describe the three vehicles Śrāvaka, Pratyekabuddha, and Bodhisattva, to emphasize their unique aims and realizations. The Bodhisattva vehicle is praised as the highest. In section XXII, The Iccha tika, those who lack spiritual aspiration are divided into two types—those who can be saved and those who cannot. Even among them, compassion and wisdom offer potential for awakening.

In the section § XXIII, three forms of svabhāva are distinguished: imagined, dependent, and perfected, mirroring the Three Natures of Yogācāra. Understanding these leads to insight into the illusory nature of all things. In the section § XXIV, the Buddha distinguishes the egolessness of persons and things, explaining that both the self and external phenomena are constructs arising from false discrimination. Liberation comes from directly perceiving their non-substantial nature through insight into the Alayavijnana. In the section § XXV, four erroneous assertions and their refutations are discussed, including mistaken views about individual marks, philosophical ideologies, causation, and objects. These conceptual extremes must be transcended to realize Mind-only and achieve enlightenment. In the section § XXVI, Bodhisattvas, understanding the non-substantiality of all things, manifest different forms to teach others, like illusions or dreams. Their compassion leads them to instruct beings in Mind-only and the illusory nature of birth and death. In section XXVII, seven types of emptiness are described, culminating in the profound emptiness of mutual non-existence, to guide practitioners beyond conceptual dualities. All phenomena are explained as ultimately non-dual, devoid of inherent birth, and without fixed nature. In the section § XXVIII, Mahamati questions whether the Tathagata-

Garbha doctrine resembles the philosophers' ego, and the Buddha clarifies that it represents the pure, unconditioned essence, not a self. This doctrine is skillfully used to ease fear of egolessness and encourage awakening.

In the section § XXIX, the Buddha lists illusory concepts like the soul, atoms, the creator, and causation as mere discriminations of the Mind. These ideas are rejected in favor of insight into Mind-only reality. In the section § XXX, four conditions help Bodhisattvas become great Yogin's: understanding Mind-only, discarding birth and cessation concepts, denying external reality, and transcending dualistic thoughts. These lead to perfect inner realization beyond discrimination. In the section § XXXI, the Buddha describes external and internal causes for the arising of phenomena, using analogies like jars made of clay and sprouts from seeds. He explains six types of causation to show that all appearances are dependent on conditions and ultimately unreal.

In the section § XXXII, Word-discrimination arises in four ways: from identifying individual marks, dream-like experiences, recollection of past actions, and beginningless habit-energy. These linguistic constructs veil true reality by generating false distinctions. In the section § XXXIII, Words and discrimination are neither identical nor different, and neither can express the highest reality, which is only accessible through noble wisdom. Language is impermanent and arises from causal conditions, making it inadequate for describing the ultimate truth. In the section § XXXIV, the verses assert that reality is beyond language and conceptuality, using imagery like dreams and illusions to describe the world. The ultimate truth is self-realized and cannot be conveyed by teaching alone.

In section XXXV, phenomena arise from the mind through discrimination and are likened to magical illusions, dreams, or mirages. Realization occurs when one transcends dualistic views and recognizes the emptiness of all objects. In the section § XXXVI, the Buddha explains that his teachings are adapted to different beings, much like a physician using varied remedies. The goal remains the same: awakening to the non-dual, unborn nature of reality. In the section § XXXVII, four meditative absorptions are outlined: those with and without conceptualization, leading up to a state of non-discrimination. Mastery in these leads to deep insight into emptiness and Mind-only. In the section § XXXVIII, Nirvana is not annihilation but the realization of non-duality, where subject-object distinctions dissolve. It is the cessation of habit-energy and discrimination, revealing the unborn nature of all things. In section XXXIX, Self-nature has dual characteristics: as conventionally discriminated against and as ultimately empty. Understanding this duality leads to liberation from conceptual fabrications.

In the section § XL, The Buddha's sustaining power operates inwardly by maintaining the Bodhisattva's meditation and outwardly by enabling compassionate manifestations. This support empowers enlightened activity for others' benefit. In section XLI, Causation is viewed as a conceptual construction rather than an absolute process. The Buddha critiques views of gradual and simultaneous arising, pointing to Mind-only as the true basis of perceived phenomena. In the section § XLII, Language and its objects are interdependent illusions; words do not capture reality. This section teaches detachment from verbal constructions to access true insight. In the section § XLIII, the Buddha explains that the concept of sound being eternal arises from cognitive error and not from the ultimate truth. Like illusions such as mirages or dreams, error appears real but lacks true existence. In the section § XLIV, all things resemble Māyā because they arise from discrimination and disappear like a lightning flash, quickly and without

substance. Māyā itself is not pure illusion but represents the appearance of reality shaped by mental constructions. In the section § XLV, the Buddha clarifies that saying all things are unborn due to their Māyā-like nature does not create contradiction, because true understanding transcends being and non-being. This teaching refutes philosophical doctrines of causation rooted in dualistic thought.

In the section § XLVI, Name, sentence, and syllable are analyzed as linguistic structures pointing to but not equating with reality. Their conceptual differentiation leads to attachment, which must be overcome for enlightenment. In the section § XLVII, certain metaphysical questions are deliberately left unanswered by the Tathāgatas to protect beings from confusion and philosophical entanglement. Such questions are beyond the realm of language and rooted in dualistic ignorance. In the section § XLVIII, using the four methods of explanation—direct statement, questioning, discernment, and exclusion—the Buddha shows that conventional truth does not reach ultimate reality. Philosophical categories like being and non-being are ultimately untenable. In the section § XLIX, The Buddha describes the spiritual progress of Śrāvakas through three grades—low, middle, and high—each overcoming specific mental fetters: personality view, doubt, and clinging to rites. Attaining Arhatship requires purification from both innate and imagined views of selfhood. In section L, there are two types of intellect: one that examines the nature of things beyond conceptual extremes, and one attached to discrimination and belief in the reality of constructed entities. The former leads to liberation, while the latter perpetuates ignorance and false views. In the section § LI, the Buddha teaches that the primary and secondary elements are mental constructions with no real existence, and that the world is Mind-only. Philosophers mistakenly perceive elements as substantial, but this view obstructs insight into the unborn nature of reality.

In the section § LII, the five skandhas including form, sensation, thought, conformation, and consciousness are explained as mental constructs without true substance. They are like dreams or mirages, and attachment to them must be abandoned for the realization of egolessness and entry into higher stages of the Bodhisattva path. In the section § LIII, four types of Nirvana are described but ultimately rejected as philosophical views, as true Nirvana is the cessation of the discriminating Manovijñāna. The other vijnanas depend on Manovijñāna, which nourishes dualistic perception and must be overcome for liberation. In section LIV, twelve aspects of false imagination are outlined, including discrimination of words, meaning, causation, and bondage. These conceptual constructs bind sentient beings to samsara and must be overcome by insight into their illusory nature. In the section § LV, these verses explain that the Citta (mind) is distorted by false imagination, which gives rise to dualistic concepts and bondage. Perfect knowledge arises when one transcends relativity and recognizes the pure nature of Mind beyond conceptual elaboration. In the section § LVI, the Buddha explains that while teachings may appear to support different vehicles including Śrāvaka, Pratyekabuddha, and Bodhisattva they are ultimately skillful means leading to the One Vehicle of Buddhahood. True understanding sees beyond these distinctions into non-dual wisdom.

Chapter Three, titled “On Impermanency,” addresses the deep metaphysical inquiries regarding the nature of existence and non-existence. This chapter features an ongoing dialogue between the Bodhisattva Mahamati and the Blessed One (the Buddha). Mahamati raises intricate philosophical questions on the nature and forms of impermanency, prompting the Buddha to deliver a nuanced teaching that challenges conventional perceptions. The discussion deconstructs the philosophical assumptions surrounding the nature of time, change, and the self, leading to the central Mahayana teaching that all phenomena are ultimately manifestations of the Mind itself.

The section § LVII introduces the concept of the will-body, explored through Mahamati's question about the nature of bodily transformation. The Blessed One teaches that the will-body has three forms: (1) the will-body born of self-mastery, (2) the will-body manifesting multiple forms to benefit others, and (3) the will-body of the Tathagata that manifests without cause due to transcendent wisdom. The will-body is not physical but arises from the mind's capacity to transform and appear in countless forms for the liberation of beings.

In the section § LVIII, the Buddha explains grave karmic transgressions known as the "Five Immediacies" and the origin of deluded existence. These immediacies, such as patricide or causing schism in the Sangha, lead directly to rebirth in hell. Furthermore, the Buddha states that desire and ignorance are metaphorically the "parents" of samsaric existence. Rooted in desire and ignorance, the circle of birth and death perpetuates suffering through powerful karmic forces. In the section § LIX, Mahamati inquires into the Buddha-nature. The Buddha reveals that Buddha-nature exists inherently in all beings but is obscured by ignorance and attachment. Enlightenment is the realization of this ever-present nature once defilements are removed.

In the section § LX, Mahamati requests clarification on the sameness of all Buddhas. The Buddha outlines four aspects of this sameness: identity of wisdom, compassion, spiritual activity, and liberative technique. Despite appearing in various forms, all Buddhas share identical realization and function for the welfare of sentient beings. In the section § LXI, Mahamati asks about the authenticity of the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha explains that true Dharma is beyond words; his speech is merely a skillful means. The ultimate truth is realized inwardly through self-realization, which transcends language and temporality. Words are provisional; the highest reality is directly experienced, not spoken.

In section LXII, Mahamati questions the extremes of existence and non-existence. The Buddha refutes both Realism and Nihilism, teaching that these are dualistic errors born of discrimination. Reality is seen only through non-dual wisdom. True understanding arises when dualistic thinking dissolves; the middle path transcends both existence and non-existence. In this section § LXIII, Mahamati probes the relationship between language and realization. The Buddha emphasizes that while words point toward the path, realization is beyond them. Verbal teachings are skillful means, not ends in themselves. Enlightenment is attained through direct insight, not through verbal knowledge alone. In section LXIV, Mahamati inquiries about the external world and attachment. The Buddha teaches that belief in an external world stems from mental discrimination. Dualism leads to attachment and suffering. The world is mind-only; liberation arises when dualistic discrimination ceases.

The section § LXV examines how language functions in Dharma. The Buddha explains that words are not reality itself. Meaning arises through mutual dependence, not inherent essence. Language must be transcended to grasp the ultimate truth. In this section § LXVI, Mahamati seeks clarity on types of knowledge. The Buddha differentiates relative, discriminative knowledge from absolute, non-dual wisdom. The latter liberate, the former binds. Liberation lies in realizing absolute wisdom, which sees through illusion. This section § LXVII outlines transformative stages on the spiritual path. The Buddha presents nine forms of transformation involving body, speech, and mind, each progressively refining perception and insight. Transformation is an essential process on the journey toward full awakening. In section LXVIII, Mahamati inquiries into the cause of clinging to existence. The Buddha explains that attachment arises from habit-energy and ignorance, causing beings to grasp at continuity and selfhood. Understanding and overcoming deep-rooted attachment is necessary for liberation. In

this section § LXIX, Mahamati questions the reality of things and their imagined nature. The Buddha replies that what is perceived as external reality is imagined by the mind. True reality is solitary, non-dual, and beyond conceptual fabrication. The self-nature of things is neither real nor unreality is beyond the reach of dualistic logic. Reality transcends imagination; it is solitary and Mind-only.

In this section § LXX, Mahamati seeks understanding of the “no-birth” doctrine. The Buddha affirms that all things are unborn, meaning they do not arise independently or inherently. Birth and death are mere conceptual constructions arising from ignorance and discrimination. Ultimately, phenomena are unborn, uncreated, and only appear to arise due to deluded perception. In this section § LXXI, Mahamati asks about the difference between true knowledge and ignorance. The Buddha explains that ignorance is rooted in false imagination and attachment, while true knowledge arises from inner realization and is free of dualism. Ignorance sees a world of separation; true knowledge sees oneness. Liberation depends on the transformation from ignorance to true, non-dual awareness. In this section § LXXII, Mahamati asks how realization is discussed without turning it into mere theory. The Buddha affirms that self-realization cannot be truly explained; it must be directly experienced. However, discourse can inspire others to seek this experience. Words are tools; realization is personal and beyond language. In the section § LXXIII, Mahamati inquires into the views of materialist philosophers known as Lokāyatikas. The Buddha refutes their belief in a purely material world governed by chance and physical causes. He critiques their denial of karma, rebirth, and spiritual liberation, asserting that such views are born from clinging to appearances. Materialist doctrines are spiritually harmful and obstruct the path to liberation.

In section LXXIV, Mahamati explores different conceptions of Nirvana. The Buddha outlines and critiques multiple philosophical views of Nirvana—as extinction, as annihilation, or as union with an eternal soul. He insists that Nirvana is beyond all views; it is the cessation of false discrimination and the realization of Mind-only. Nirvana is not a place or state—it is the end of dualistic illusion. In the section § LXXV, Mahamati asks whether Buddhahood is a conditioned state. The Buddha responds that Tathāgatahood is not made or born; it transcends the skandhas (aggregates) and is not caused. It is the realization of the eternal, unconditioned nature of Mind. Buddhahood is the recognition of the unmade, unborn truth—not a product of fabrication.

In the section § LXXVI, Mahamati inquiries about the use of names and language in teaching. The Buddha explains that the Tathāgata is called by many names to suit the capacity of beings. However, the true Tathāgata transcends all designations. He reaffirms that ultimate reality cannot be spoken—it is a silent, self-known truth. The Tathāgata teaches with compassion, but the ultimate truth is beyond all words. In the section § LXXVII, Mahamati probes the interrelation of key concepts: causation, no-birth, mind, and Nirvana. The Buddha reiterates that causation is a mental construction. All things are unborn, being projections of the Self-mind. Nirvana is not a place or event, but the realization that nothing is ever born or ceases. When the mind sees its own nature, all notions of cause and effect fall away into Nirvana.

The section § LXXVIII presents poetic verses summarizing earlier teachings. The verses stress that causation, birth, and cessation are unreal; the mind alone creates illusion. True understanding lies in perceiving this no-birth nature of reality. Wisdom arises when the cause-and-effect is abandoned and the truth of no-birth is seen. In the section § LXXIX, Mahamati asks

about different understandings of impermanence. The Buddha lists and refutes a range of mistaken views—some see impermanence as real, some deny it, and others distort it. He teaches that clinging to any such view misses the point. Impermanence is neither real nor unreal; it is Mind-only. Impermanence is a concept shaped by mental discrimination; true vision transcends it.

Chapter Four, titled “On Intuitive Understanding,” delves into the spiritual and philosophical realization known as nirodha—perfect tranquillisation—and its progression through the Bodhisattva stages. Presented as a dialogue between Mahamati and the Blessed One (the Buddha), this chapter contrasts the depth of intuitive realization achieved by Bodhisattvas with the more limited experiences of Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas. The teaching reveals that true liberation is not just meditative cessation, but profound non-dual understanding rooted in Mind-only insight.

In this section § LXXX, Mahamati initiates this chapter by asking the Buddha to explain the nature and development of perfect tranquillisation (nirodha), especially how it differs among Bodhisattvas, Sravakas, and Pratyekabuddhas. The Buddha explains that all three groups reach tranquillisation by the sixth stage. However, only Bodhisattvas who reach the seventh stage attain constant tranquillisation, due to abandoning belief in inherent self-nature. In contrast, Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas retain traces of dualistic thinking, grasped and grasping, which limits their realization. By the eighth stage, Bodhisattvas transcend mental discriminations from the Citta, Manas, and Manovijnana. Their realization surpasses that of the other two vehicles, as Bodhisattvas are guided by compassion and the support of Buddhas to avoid clinging to blissful states. Thus, they delay Nirvana in favor of benefiting all beings. Tranquillity deepens stage by

stage for Bodhisattvas, reaching a non-dual, imageless state of understanding beyond dualistic cessation. Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas, while attaining stillness, remain limited by subtle grasping.

Mahamati continues the inquiry by requesting further detail on how Bodhisattvas progress in understanding, especially through higher stages beyond the eighth. The Buddha responds that beginning from the first to sixth stage, practitioners recognize the world as Mind-only and reject the ego-soul. At the seventh, Bodhisattvas examine the Citta, Manas, Manovijnana, and the illusory nature of all constructs. By the eighth, Bodhisattvas transcend even the bliss of tranquillisation, no longer attached to Nirvana itself. Instead, out of compassion and awareness of their vows, they remain engaged in helping others awaken. Their actions are grounded in self-realization and imageless wisdom. The ninth and tenth stages involve even subtler insights, culminating in the Tathagata's own realm—a state of absolute solitude beyond discrimination. True enlightenment transcends progressive stages and dualistic thought. Bodhisattvas mature beyond form, culminating in a state of unborn, imageless, and non-dual realization.

Chapter Five, titled "On the Deduction of the Permanency of Tathagatahood," engages with one of the most delicate questions in Mahayana metaphysics: whether the Tathagata—the Enlightened One—is permanent or impermanent. In this single-section chapter, Mahamati, the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, continues his dialogue with the Blessed One (the Buddha), probing deeply into the ontological status of the Tathagata. The Buddha's reply challenges binary thinking, showing that both permanence and impermanence are conceptual limitations when applied to ultimate reality.

In the section § LXXXI, Mahamati asks a profound and fundamental question: Is the Tathagata permanent or impermanent? This inquiry introduces the central paradox addressed in the chapter—the applicability of temporal categories to enlightened reality. The Buddha responds by rejecting both characterizations. If the Tathagata were permanent, he would be like a created entity—akin to space or abstract forms like the horns of a hare—void of actual substance. Likewise, if impermanent, the Tathagata would be like a material object (e.g., jug, garment) subject to destruction. The Tathagata is said to transcend both categories because he arises not from causes rooted in ignorance (habit-energy, mental faculties, or skandhas), but from transcendental knowledge (prajñājñāna). This knowledge is permanent in a different sense: it is the regulative principle (dharmatā) underlying enlightenment. However, the Tathagata is not to be grasped as a fixed entity, nor as a mere momentary formation. Instead, he exemplifies the "permanency of no-birth", a state free from conceptual extremes. The Buddha further explains that dualistic thinking (permanency and impermanency) arises from word-discrimination, which must be overcome to realize absolute solitude and non-duality. This realization dissolves the illusion of opposites and affirms that all phenomena are ultimately Mind-only. The chapter ends with verses reinforcing this: 1) Philosophical doctrines rooted in dualism obscure true vision, 2) Liberation comes not by denying permanence but by overcoming discriminatory knowledge, 3) When one sees that all things are Mind-only, disputes over permanence vanish. The Tathagata is neither permanent nor impermanent. His reality is non-dual, grounded in unborn, intuitive wisdom that transcends philosophical speculation.

Chapter 6, titled “On Momentariness,” explores the profound Buddhist question of whether phenomena exist moment by moment or endure through time. In dialogue with the Bodhisattva Mahamati, the Buddha explains that the true understanding of momentariness

involves both psychological insight and metaphysical clarity. The discourse is anchored in the Yogacara concept of the Alayavijnana (Storehouse-Consciousness) and Tathagata-Garbha (Womb of the Buddha), revealing the subtleties of transformation and permanence within the flux of consciousness.

In the section § LXXXII, Mahamati asks the Buddha about the rising and disappearing of phenomena like the Skandhas, Dhatus, and Ayatanas, questioning what it means if there is no ego-soul. The Buddha explains that these perceived phenomena arise due to the habit-energy of the Citta, Manas, and Manovijnana. Though they appear to be good or bad, real or unreal, these are discriminated projections of Mind. True understanding sees these as Mind-only constructs. The five Skandhas, often interpreted as momentary and self-appropriating, are in fact sustained by ignorance and discrimination. Without insight into non-duality and egolessness, people misinterpret momentariness, falling into either nihilism or eternalism.

In the section § LXXXIII–LXXXIV, Mahamati seeks clarification on how momentariness applies to the Alayavijnana and other Vijnanas. The Buddha explains that Manas and the five sensory Vijnanas arise and cease moment to moment, based on false discrimination. The Alayavijnana, however, while momentary associated with evolving Vijnanas, remains non-momentary in its pure state associated with non-outflows (anasrava). The ignorant fail to grasp this dual nature and thereby adhere to an incomplete view of momentariness. True understanding differentiates momentary evolving consciousness from the timeless purity of the Tathagata-Garbha.

In the section § LXXXV, Mahamati inquires into the consequences of misunderstanding momentariness. The Buddha warns that clinging to the doctrine of momentariness without

insight leads to nihilism, the rejection of deeper realities like the uncreated (asamskrita). Such views obscure the function of the Alayavijnana, though linked to arising and ceasing, is not itself subject to destruction or suffering. Clinging to simplistic views on momentariness causes delusion and obstructs realization.

In the section § LXXXVI, Mahamati asks for a deeper interpretation of the term "momentary." The Buddha uses analogies (river, lamp, seeds) to explain that what seems momentary flows due to habit-energy, but this does not mean ultimate non-existence. Instead, things are quiescent, unborn, and non-destroyable in the ultimate truth. He distinguishes between phenomenal continuity and ontological momentariness, stating that only discrimination gives rise to perceptions of arising and ceasing. Real momentariness means transcending all fabricated views—phenomena are empty, quiescent, and Mind-only.

In the section § LXXXVII, Mahamati asks the Buddha how the Six Paramitas are fulfilled considering momentariness and non-dual insight. The Buddha explains that there are three kinds of Paramitas: worldly, super-worldly, and highest super-worldly. The highest form is practiced by Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas, who, understanding that all things are Mind-only, practice the Paramitas free from attachment and discrimination. For example, charity is given without a self or recipient, morality is practiced without ego, and Prajna arises from deep insight into non-duality. The Paramitas attain their true form only when practiced from the view of non-discrimination and insight into the Mind-only nature of reality.

Chapter 7, titled "On Transformation," centers on the concept of transformation (parināma), both as philosophical doctrine and as spiritual reality. In a dialogue with Mahamati, the Buddha distinguishes between apparent transformations seen by the ignorant and the deeper

insight of enlightened beings. The chapter uses rich metaphors to convey that all transformations are projections of the mind, and therefore illusory, even as they appear real to unenlightened beings. This teaching ultimately ties into the doctrine of Tathagata-garbha, revealing the basis for sentient beings' transmigration and potential for liberation. In the section § LXXXIX, Mahamati begins with a series of layered questions, inquiring how Arhats are given the assurance of Buddhahood, how transformation-Buddhas function, and how transformation relates to momentary mental processes and karmic remnants. The Buddha answers that all such transformations arise for the benefit of sentient beings, and not because Buddhas experience birth or death. He explains that the Nirvana without residue (no substratum left) is a skillful means for inspiring practitioners. True Tathagatas do not deliberate or speak; their teachings arise spontaneously from deep Samadhi and intuitive wisdom. The Buddha distinguishes between Transformation-Buddhas and Original Tathagatas, emphasizing that transformation is only apparent, like a dream or a mirage.

The seven Vijnanas (sense-consciousnesses, Manas, Manovijnana) are characterized by momentariness due to their dependence on habit-energy. In contrast, what truly transmigrates is the Tathagata-garbha, which is the ground of both Nirvana and samsaric experience. The Buddha also refutes the extremes of nihilism (arising from misunderstanding cessation) and eternalism (from failing to see the deeper nature of consciousness). The chapter concludes with gathas (verses) summarizing key teachings: 1)Nirvana is not a separate thing but the cessation of fault, 2)There is no real birth or death; transformation is mind-only, 3) Enlightenment is not conditioned by karma but arises from turning-back (paravritti)—a reversal in the foundation of consciousness. Transformation is not real in itself but arises from mental discrimination. True

understanding sees no birth, no death—only the play of mind in various forms, destined for awakening.

Chapter 8, titled “On Meat-Eating,” presents a powerful ethical discourse on the consumption of animal flesh, rooted in the Mahayana Buddhist emphasis on compassion (karuṇā). In response to a question from Mahamati, the Buddha provides a comprehensive and categorical rejection of meat-eating. This chapter outlines the karmic consequences, spiritual impurities, social perceptions, and moral contradictions associated with consuming meat, urging Bodhisattvas to abstain entirely. It is one of the most emphatic anti-meat discourses in Buddhist scripture

Chapter 9, titled “The Dhāraṇīs,” presents a mystical and protective aspect of Mahayana Buddhism. In this chapter, the Buddha delivers a series of magical phrases known as Dhāraṇīs, which are to be memorized, recited, and realized by practitioners. These formulas are declared by Buddhas of the past, present, and future for the benefit of Dharma-preachers, and are believed to offer protection from harm, especially from malevolent beings such as Rakshasas. This chapter marks a shift from philosophical discourse to ritual and esoteric practice, reinforcing the sacredness and power of spoken language when charged with enlightened intention.

3.2.3 Key Terms

According to Suzuki’s translation, the table below lists important terms that relate to the research question

Sanskrit Term	**Meaning**
Advaya	Non-duality; reality beyond pairs of opposites.
Sunyata	Emptiness; reality beyond being and non-being.
Parikalpita	False Imagination *constitutes* the illusory world perceived as real
Cittamatra	Mind-only; the doctrine that reality is Mind itself.
Vikalpa	Discrimination; relative knowledge on the plane of dualism; dichotomy.
Paravritti	"Turning back" or "revulsion"; spiritual transformation/conversion in Alayavijnana.

Figure 3: Table of key terms in The Lankavatara sutra

3.2.4 Theme:

The *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* is a Mahāyāna scripture that articulates a profound vision of awakening through the direct realization of the true nature of the mind. Its teachings are framed primarily for people who practice the path of the bodhisattva because they can apprehend the ultimate reality beyond the reach of conceptual elaboration. Waldron (2003) note that the

Lankāvatāra is a transitional text that bridges earlier Mahāyāna insights to the Yogācāra school. The main themes in this sutra are presented via Mind-only, Emptiness, non-duality, critique of language and speculative philosophy, the five Dharmas, and the Buddha-nature teaching.

The main principle of the text is the doctrine of Mind-only (*cittamātra* or *vijñaptimātra*), which asserts that all phenomena inside and outside are just a projection of consciousness. There is no independently existing external world, so what is perceived arises from the operations of consciousness that are shaped by deep-seated karmic tendencies (*vāsanā*) stored in the storehouse consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*). Twofold storehouse consciousness includes the Alaya itself and the Alaya as a mental representation. There are eight kinds of consciousness, including storehouse consciousness, manas, and the six-sense consciousness. They can be divided into two groups: a perceiving group with storehouse consciousness and a manas, and a discriminating group with six-sense consciousness. The purpose is not to affirm the storehouse as an unchanging self, but it aims to realize its constructed nature and achieve liberation from its influence.

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is the following principle mentioned in many places in the sutra. In this sutra, Emptiness is a deeper realization that all phenomena are devoid of self-nature (*svabhāva*) instead of superficial forms of Emptiness. In other words, Emptiness is not a metaphysical void, but it is the insight that all objects and perceptions arise dependently and lack inherent existence. It is applied as a critical tool to counter fixed views, including Emptiness. The principle of non-duality (*advaya*) is another major theme that critiques discriminative thinking (*vikalpa*), which divides experience into binary oppositions such as self and other, subject and object, samsāra and nirvāṇa. This false dualism is rooted in habitual tendencies and reinforced by linguistic and conceptual activity. Liberation, in this context, is achieved through

parāvṛtti, which is a radical turning of the basis of consciousness in which these dualistic structures collapse. This transformation leads to the realization that reality is experienced directly without concepts.

The *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* also offers a critique of language and speculative philosophy. The Buddha warns that attachment to words, doctrines, and logical constructions becomes a hindrance to awakening. Philosophers (*tīrthikas*) and even śrāvakas are shown to make mistakes in their conceptual constructs for ultimate truths. True knowledge, according to the sutra, is direct inner realization, which is not dependent on external authority or conceptual mediation (Waldron, 2003). The ultimate truth beyond languages, descriptions, and verbal discrimination. The next one is the Five Dharmas (*pañca dharmāḥ*), mentioned as a progression from delusion to realization. First is appearance (*nimitta*), referring to sensory impressions such as form and sound. Second is the name (*nāma*), the conceptual labeling imposed on appearances. Third is discrimination (*vikalpa*), the mind's attachment to names and forms, generating dualities and error. Fourth is right knowledge (*samyag-jñāna*), the insight that names and appearances are empty of inherent existence and interdependently arise. Finally, suchness (*tathatā*) is the ultimate reality beyond conceptual construction, directly realized through non-dual wisdom (*āryajñāna*) and free from dualistic thought. In other words, the first three, like appearance, name, and discrimination, correspond to imaginary and dependent constructions. The final two, like right knowledge and suchness, belong to the realm of perfect knowledge (*pariniṣpanna*)

Lastly, the teaching of the tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-nature) appears as a doctrinal support for universal liberation. The sutra emphasizes that Buddha-nature is a skillful means (*upāya*) intended to encourage beings who fear non-self. Just as *ālaya-vijñāna* is a provisional construct, *tathāgatagarbha* is introduced to inspire confidence in the capacity for awakening and to

counterbalance despair. In the sutra, the tathāgatagarbha also refers to Emptiness, Nirvana, being unborn, unqualified, and devoid of will-effort.

In conclusion, the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* points out a complex spiritual vision centered on the transformation of consciousness through the direct realization of Mind-only, the abandonment of conceptual duality, and the cultivation of experiential wisdom. Through its sustained critique of language, conceptuality, and fixed views, the sutra functions as both a philosophical deconstruction and a soteriological guide, directed toward those prepared to realize the true nature of mind beyond thought.

3.2.5 Interpretation

3.2.5.1 Listeners

According to Suzuki (1998), the Fourfold being in the sutra includes three Śrāvaka (hearers), Pratyekabuddha, Bodhisattvas, and Bala-Prithagjana. Another kind of listener found in the sutra is philosophers, so there are five distinct listeners in the sutra. The bodhisattvas or people who practice the bodhisattva path are the main listeners in this sutra, but other kinds of beings listed in the sutra are to reflect the distinctives compared to the bodhisattvas' path. The table below summarizes the definition, limitations, potential growth, and goals of the five kinds of practitioners.

Listen Type	**Definition**	**Limitation**	**Potential growth**	**Goals**

1. Bala-Prithagjana *(Ignorant)*	Unawakened beings are dominated by karmic habit-energy, sense craving, and false imagination.	Emotional ignorance, sensual attachment, and lack of moral basis.	Needs ethical and meditative foundation; gradual path.	Worldly happiness or survival; no spiritual goal yet.
2.Philosophers *(Tīrthikas)*	Non-Buddhist thinkers are attached to conceptual systems such as self, creator, substance, and nihilism.	Intellectual pride, attachment to views, and language.	Can be converted if they abandon fixed views.	Speculative truth claims; liberation through metaphysics or logic.
3. Śrāvakas *(Hearers)*	Buddhist disciples who attain Arhatship by listening to the Dharma and practicing the Eightfold Path.	Dualistic thoughts; views of Nirvāṇa as cessation of aggregates.	Realization of non-self and dependent origination.	Personal liberation from samsara (Arhatship).

4. Pratyekabuddhas *(Solitary Buddhas*	Beings who awaken independently, often in Dharma-dark ages, but do not teach others.	Attachment to solitary realization; lack of pedagogical activity.	Deep insight into impermanence, but incomplete awakening from the Mahayana perspective	Personal awakening through dependent origination.
5. **Bodhisattvas**	Mahāyāna practitioners seek full Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.	Engage in world-liberation through insight and compassion.	Ultimate realization of non-duality and Mind-only.	Universal liberation through the realization of non-duality and compassion.

Figure 4: Table of audiences

3.2.5.2 The Middle Way in the Lankavatara

The Lankavatara Sutra illuminates the Mahayana path by intricately weaving together five core concepts, such as Mind-Only (Cittamātra), Emptiness (Śūnyatā), Non-Duality (Advaya), Buddha-nature (Tathagatagarbha), and Self-Realization (Pratyātma-gati), all of which serve to articulate and guide practitioners along the Middle Way. This Middle Way is presented implicitly in the Sutra via transcending the dualistic extremes that characterize ordinary

perception and philosophical speculation, extremes like eternalism versus nihilism and being versus non-being. The following sections explore how the Middle Way is presented via doctrines of Mind-Only, Emptiness, Non-Duality, Buddha-nature (Tathagatagarbha), and Self-Realization.

The doctrine of Mind-Only (Cittamātra) in the Lankavatara Sutra asserts that the entire triple world is fundamentally the manifestation of the Mind-only. It explains that the perception of an external world, including apparently independent objects, bodies, properties, and residences, is a manifestation or projection arising from the discriminations and habit-energy (vāsanā) accumulated within one's own mind system (specifically the Ālayavijñāna) since beginningless time (Suzuki, 2009). Understanding this is crucial for liberation because it reveals that the perceived subject-object duality (grasped and grasping) is an error based on failure to recognize the world as the Mind. The teaching of Mind-Only serves as a skillful means (upāya) to guide beings away from attachment to a false perception of external reality. By demonstrating that the objective world lacks independent existence, it helps practitioners cease the discriminations that fuel suffering and transmigration. This relates directly to the Middle Way by avoiding the extreme of materialism or realism (affirming independently existing external objects) and the opposite extreme of nihilism (denying any basis for experience) when asserting that the Mind is the fundamental reality. Realizing Mind-Only leads towards recognizing the ultimate nature of reality beyond dualistic frameworks.

Emptiness (Śūnyatā), as presented in the Lankavatara Sutra, represents the fundamental lack of inherent self-nature or enduring ego-substance (ātman) in all phenomena (dharmas) and persons. It means that things perceived through discrimination, including the Skandhas, Dhatus, and Ayatanas, are devoid of an independent and unchanging essence because they depend on

various conditions. In the Sutra, there are seven kinds of Emptiness including the Emptiness of individual marks (lakshana-śūnyatā), self-nature (bhāvasvabhāva-śūnyatā), no-work (apracarita-śūnyatā), work (pracarita-śūnyatā), all things in the sense that they are unpredicable (nirabhilāpya-śūnyatā), mutuality (itaretara-śūnyatā), and the Emptiness culminating in the highest Emptiness, which is the ultimate reality itself, realizable only through noble wisdom (Paramārtha-āryajñāna-mahāśūnyatā) (Suzuki, 2009). The teaching of Emptiness functions as a skillful means by eliminating attachments, and understanding it helps practitioners see through the illusion of inherent existence, which leads toward the realization of non-duality and the unborn nature of reality. In other words, Emptiness is the Middle Way because it refutes the extreme of eternalism and avoids nihilism. Additionally, it doesn't absolutely negate existence, but it aims to deconstruct extremes, even the doctrine of Emptiness itself, and transcend conceptual extremes like being and non-being.

Non-Duality (Advaya) in the Lankavatara Sutra refers to the ultimate nature of reality, which transcends all forms of dualistic conceptualization and discrimination. It illustrates that distinctions commonly held as fundamental opposites, such as being and non-being, subject and object, samsara and nirvana, purity and defilement, birth and death, are relative constructions of the discriminating mind and do not pertain to the ultimate truth. In the sutra, liberation means abandoning dualistic discrimination, which are the root of clinging and suffering (Suzuki, 2009). The teaching of non-duality serves as a skillful means by directly challenging and undermining the habit of dichotomous thinking, so it guides the mind towards a unified perception of reality. In essence, non-duality is the Middle Way in this context, as its definition involves steering clear of all pairs of conceptual extremes that structure ordinary thought and philosophical speculation.

Therefore, realizing non-duality means seeing beyond these oppositions to the underlying unified reality.

The Tathagata-Garbha, often translated as Buddha-nature, is described in the Lankavatara Sutra as the inherently pure, luminous, eternal, and unchanging potential for Buddhahood present within all sentient beings. It is depicted as being hidden or obscured by the coverings of the Skandhas, Dhatus, Ayatanas, and the defilements of greed, anger, folly, and false imagination, like a precious gem wrapped in a dirty cloth. The teaching of the Tathagata-Garbha is explicitly presented as a skillful means (upāya) designed to counteract the fear that the "ignorant" might feel when hearing the doctrine of egolessness or emptiness, and this also helps practitioners not fall into nihilism. It relates to the Middle Way because it is the tool to detach the extreme of nihilism (denying any potential for enlightenment) and the extreme of eternalism (positing an independent, unchanging soul). In addition, the Sutra strongly emphasizes that the Tathagata-Garbha is not the same as the permanent ego-soul (Atman) taught by philosophers, but it is synonymous with concepts like emptiness, reality-limit, and the unborn.

Self-realization in the Lankavatara Sutra refers to the direct inner realization of intuitive experience or attainment (pratyātma-gati) of ultimate reality through noble wisdom. This state is characterized as being beyond words, letters, logic, discrimination, and all dualistic conceptions such as being and non-being, subject and object, or oneness and otherness. It is the goal towards which all the teachings and skillful means point, but it itself is not a skillful means. Compared to others mentioned above, it is the only way to recognize the ultimate truth by directly realizing the "truth of solitude" or Suchness. Self-Realization is the ultimate embodiment of the Middle Way because it represents the experience of reality free from the extremes grasped by intellect. It

transcends all philosophical views, including eternalism and nihilism, by completely moving beyond the conceptual mind into direct, imageless insight.

In summary, the Lankavatara Sutra positions Mind-Only, Emptiness, Non-Duality, and the teaching of Tathagata-Garbha as crucial frameworks and skillful means for going beyond dualistic extremes. By revealing the world as Mind-Only, demonstrating the Emptiness of inherent existence, advocating for a Non-Dual perspective, and positing the Tathagata-Garbha, the Sutra provides specific antidotes to the extremes of realism, nihilism, eternalism, and annihilationism. These teachings function as indispensable guides, clearing away the conceptual thickets of dualistic thought that obscure the path. They all converge upon the final goal: Self-Realization. This direct, intuitive apprehension of reality is an experiential state transcending all pairs of opposites and constituting the ultimate aim of the Mahayana journey described within the Sutra.

3.3. Comparison of the Middle Way in the Kaccānagotta sutta and the Middle Way in the Lankavatara sutra

The concept of the Middle Way plays a crucial role in Buddhism, and it is often considered a practical path that steers between sensual indulgence and self-mortification. he two questions posed above explore distinct articulations of the Middle Way as a means to transcend metaphysical extremes, as represented in both the Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions. The Kaccānagotta Sutta presents the Middle Way as a direct insight into dependent origination, which avoids the dichotomy of existence and non-existence. In contrast, the Lankāvatāra Sūtra implies the Middle Way through doctrines and skillful means, including Mind-Only, Emptiness, Non-Duality, and Buddha-Nature that dismantle subtler forms of conceptual clinging. This

analysis compares the notion of the Middle Way in these two texts across four analytical categories: ontological framework, source of error, skillful means, right view (sammā-diṭṭhi), and self-realization (pratyātma-gati).

The ontological framework of each text reflects its respective doctrinal tradition and significantly shapes its interpretation of the Middle Way. As depicted above, the doctrine of the Kaccānagotta Sutta is Dependent Origination, which means material and mental events are interdependent with each other. The development of the Right view initiates the Middle Way, which weakens the twelve links because wisdom developed by the Right view is the antidote to ignorance and cravings that are fuel for the cycle. In other words, the Middle Way is to interrupt the continual cycle of the twelve links, so the perfectly cultivated Middle Way leads to liberation.

By contrast, the Lankāvatāra Sūtra introduces the Middle Way through a more constructivist and cognitive ontological framework, where all phenomenal appearances are understood as projections of consciousness rather than external realities. The doctrine of Mind-Only (Cittamātra) asserts that external objects do not exist independently of the perceiving mind; rather, they are cognitive projections arising from latent karmic imprints (vāsanā) stored in the ālaya-vijñāna (Suzuki, 2009). In this view, the Middle Way begins by deconstructing belief in external realism and culminates in the realization that subject-object duality is itself a mental construction, instead of an objective division in reality. This ontological model reframes existence in terms of mental fabrication, situating the Middle Way within the transformation of consciousness rather than merely the analysis of conditions.

Both texts identify different sources of error that lead practitioners to adopt extreme views, though they share a common emphasis on delusion and clinging. In the Kaccānagotta Sutta, the source of error is ignorance-based contact, particularly the interaction between the six sense bases, their objects, and consciousness. This leads to sensation, craving, and ultimately clinging to speculative views about self and world. These distorted perceptions are generated through the operation of the five aggregates, which create the illusion of identity and permanence. Thus, clinging arises from the misinterpretation of conditioned processes as substantial realities.

The Lankāvatāra Sūtra, however, attributes the source of error to false imagination that is the next stage of discrimination, the discriminative activity of consciousness that constructs dualities. These discriminations are sustained by karmic residues in the storehouse consciousness ālaya-vijñāna, which gives rise to the projection of a dualistic world. In other words, this innate tendency of the mind projects dualities (like grasper and grasped, subject and object) onto reality based on beginningless habit-energy (vāsanā) stored in the storehouse consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). The sutra systematically targets different forms of misperception with specific teachings, including Mind-Only to correct externalism, Emptiness to dismantle intrinsic essence, and Non-Duality to dissolve binary thinking. In this framework, error is cognitive, karmic, and conceptual, requiring a multi-tiered response.

The teachings embodying the Middle Way in both texts clearly function as skillful means (Upāya), but their strategies differ. In the Kaccānagotta Sutta, the explanation of Dependent Origination serves as a precise and foundational skillful means. It provides a rational and observable principle to directly counter the prevalent metaphysical extremes of eternalism and

annihilationism, guiding the practitioner towards a grounded Right View. The Lankavatara Sutra employs its array of core doctrines, like Mind-only, Emptiness, Non-duality, and Buddha-nature, as a diverse toolkit of skillful means. Each concept acts as a specific antidote: Mind-Only for realism, Emptiness for substantialism, Non-Duality for all dichotomies, and Buddha-nature as an explicit means to counter fear of Emptiness and nihilistic despair. This variety allows the teachings to be adapted to different mentalities and stages of the Mahayana path. Moreover, the Lankavatara consistently frames even its most profound teachings as provisional pointers toward an ineffable realization, explicitly highlighting the Upāya nature of all conceptual doctrines.

A deeper contrast between the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Lankāvatāra Sūtra emerges when comparing their culminating epistemic principles: right view (sammā-diṭṭhi) and self-realization (pratyātma-gati). In the Kaccānagotta, right view refers to insight into dependent origination and the avoidance of speculative extremes such as eternalism and annihilationism. At the initial level, right view arises from learning and reflection, such as conceptual understanding of conditionality and non-self. Through deepening ethical conduct and meditative cultivation, the wisdom is developed, so this understanding becomes direct experiential knowledge, wherein the practitioner sees the arising and cessation of phenomena without identification or conceptual proliferation. Ultimately, right view becomes non-clinging awareness and is rooted in wisdom that leads to the cessation of suffering.

In contrast, the Lankāvatāra Sūtra presents self-realization as a radical culmination beyond even the most refined forms of insight. Self-realization (pratyātma-gati) is not a view or cognition, but it is the direct, imageless realization of suchness (tathatā). It cannot be conveyed through language or attained through conceptual refinement. In other words, it entails a complete

transformation beyond subject-object duality and discriminative consciousness. While right view develops through stages and prepares the ground by progressively eliminating conceptual attachment, self-realization arises. In this sense, right view initiates and matures the path, but self-realization is the final, inexpressible arrival, or complete transcendence of all views. The two are not in opposition, but they represent distinct stages on the continuum from clarity to release.

In summary, the comparative analysis of the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Lankāvatāra Sūtra reveals complementary expressions of the Middle Way, shaped by their respective doctrinal frameworks and soteriological aims. The Kaccānagotta Sutta presents the Middle Way as a precise and pragmatic insight into dependent origination, emphasizing a processual ontology that deconstructs speculative extremes through the cultivation of the right view. It is a gradual path wherein wisdom matures into non-clinging awareness through ethical conduct, meditation, and experiential understanding. In contrast, the Lankāvatāra Sūtra embeds the Middle Way in a series of doctrinal skillful means including Mind-Only, Emptiness, Non-Duality, and Buddha-Nature. Each function as a therapeutic intervention against specific cognitive and karmic distortions. These teachings do not culminate in a fixed view but in the direct, imageless self-realization of suchness, which lies beyond the realm of conceptuality altogether. While right view and self-realization differ in their function and depth, they are situated along a shared continuum of liberative insight. Both Buddhist scriptures from the Theravada tradition and the Mahayana tradition reveal that the Middle Way is presented in various ways, but all of them reach the same ultimate goal, which is liberation.

3.4. Comparison of the Middle Way in the Kaccānagotta sutta and the Middle Way in the section LXII of the Lankavatara sutra

Some people argue that the Kaccānagotta Sutta from the Pali Canon and Section LXII of the Mahāyāna Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra are essentially identical in their antidote to the duality between existence and non-existence. This section aims to critically examine this claim by comparing the two passages in detail to determine whether their teachings are truly equivalent or merely superficially similar.

3.4.1. Rejection to extremes

Both texts have a similar feature, which is an explicit rejection of the two fundamental ontological extremes. The Kaccānagotta Sutta states that the world depends on the dual concepts of existence and non-existence, and subsequently labels "'All exists'" and "'All does not exist'" as the two extremes to be avoided. Furthermore, Lankavatara LXII makes precisely the same observation: "People of this world are dependent on two things... the idea of being and on that of non-being", which causes them to "fall into the views whereby they take pleasure either in nihilism or in realism". Both texts recognize that ordinary perception and conventional philosophy are trapped within these dualistic extremes. They agree that true understanding, or "right view," necessitates moving beyond affirming either that things possess an ultimate, enduring existence, such as eternalism or realism, or that they are utterly non-existent, amounting to nothing like nihilism or annihilationism. This parallel identification of the fundamental problem forms the crucial common ground between the two texts.

3.4.2 Historical context

The historical context is a distinguishing feature of both scriptures. The context of Kaccānagotta Sutta took place in Sāvatthī, a historically specific recognized location in ancient India, featuring a direct conversation between the Buddha and Venerable Kaccānagotta, a prominent disciple known for his analytical skills. Kaccānagotta's question, "How is right view

defined?", is characteristic of the Sravaka (disciple) path focused on understanding the foundational teachings for individual liberation. This places the sutta firmly within the context of early Buddhism as represented in the Pali Canon.

In contrast, Section LXII of the Lankavatara Sutra features the Buddha engaging with Mahāmati, the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva, a figure representing the advanced Mahayana ideal of striving for the enlightenment of all beings. The setting is the mythical Lanka, and Mahāmati's question concerns the being and nonbeing of all things with the explicit aim that he and other Bodhisattva Mahasattvas may quickly attain supreme enlightenment. This context, along with the sophisticated Mahayana terminology used throughout the Lankavatara, places Section LXII within a later, philosophically more complex, and cosmologically distinct tradition. These differences in listeners (Sravaka vs. Bodhisattva), setting (historical vs. mythical), and textual tradition (Pali Canon vs. Mahayana Sutra) fundamentally shape the discourse and intended scope of each text.

3.4.3 The foundational principle for the Middle Way

Where both scriptures diverge significantly is in the foundational principle they use to articulate how the Middle Way transcends these identified extremes. The Kaccānagotta Sutta explains the path through the lens of Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda). By understanding the conditioned nature of reality, or how suffering arises when its conditions like ignorance, choices, and consciousness, are present, one sees beyond the extremes of annihilationism. Conversely, by understanding how suffering ceases when its conditions cease, one sees beyond the extreme of eternalism. The Middle Way is thus presented as understanding the dynamic, interdependent process of arising and ceasing, devoid of any permanent, independent entity.

Section LXII in the Lankavatara sutra, however, explains the Middle Way primarily through the Mahayana doctrines of Mind-Only (Cittamātra) and Suchness (Tathatā). It argues that the clinging to being and non-being stems from a failure to recognize that the perceived external world is Mind itself. The path involves ceasing the mental discrimination that projects this duality. When the mind stops grasping at the illusion of an external world and the dualities inherent in intellection cease, one realizes the "essence of suchness (tathatā), which is the [spiritual] realm of the wise". While both approaches deconstruct fixed views, Dependent Origination focuses on conditionality and the process of suffering, whereas Mind-Only focuses on the nature of perception and the realization of an underlying, non-dual reality such as Suchness.

3.4.4 Non-self and Nihilism

The next difference between Kaccānagotta sutta and Lankavatara LXII is ego and nihilism. The Kaccānagotta Sutta emphasizes the practical realization of non-self and the direct insight into suffering. In other words, knowledge is attained by detaching one's self-identity, so independent phenomena are observed without being conditioned. On the other hand, Lankavatara LXII delves into more detailed analyses of the flawed views associated with nihilism, such as acknowledging passions like greed but denying their reality or cause. It also contains a particularly strong and specific warning against a "self-conceited view of being and non-being," leading to a misunderstanding of emptiness, deeming this more destructive than even clinging to a substantial ego-soul. This suggests an engagement with specific philosophical debates and potential misinterpretations prevalent within the Mahayana context, which are not the focus of the Kaccānagotta Sutta.

3.4.5 Conclusion

Based on this comparison, the claim that the Kaccānagotta Sutta and section LXII of the Lankavatara Sutra are identical is not accurate. The only shared feature of both scriptures is the rejection of the extremes of existence and non-existence. They differ significantly in their explanatory frameworks, like Dependent Origination and Mind-Only, their historical contexts, the figures involved, such as Sravaka disciple and Bodhisattva, or Venerable Kaccānagotta and Mahamati. In other words, although both texts address the same philosophical issue concerning the extremes of being and non-being, they offer distinct foundational principles to explain and solve the problem. This divergence reflects the historical development and adaptation of Buddhist thought to broader, more universal audiences. Nonetheless, the ultimate goal remains the same: the transcendence of dualistic extremes and conceptual fabrications.

4. Chapter Four: *Discussion*

4.1 The Middle Way in Kacchanagotta

The Middle Way is mentioned explicitly in the Kaccanagotta Sutta, but it is still too brief to depict a full picture of the Middle Way. From Nagarjuna's philosophy to current generations, many people analyze and comment on this scripture to clarify its profound meaning. The Buddha tends to keep quiet about questions concerning the origins of the world or universe because it doesn't help people end their suffering. For example, In MN 72 Aggivacchasutta of the Majjhima Nikāya, Vacchagotta asks the questions regarding the notions of existence and non-existence, but the Buddha keeps quiet because he knows giving answers just satisfies the curiosity of Vacchagotta instead of helping him recognize the Dhamma (Sujato, 2018). The Venerable Kaccana is a well-known disciple of the Buddha for being the best master of expositions. He also has an education foundation in ancient Indian philosophy that often debates metaphysical problems before meeting the Buddha. Therefore, when he asks questions about the right view, the Buddha answers based on his knowledge. In addition, Venerable Kaccana rarely meets the Buddha, which proves his qualifications and his educational background. In other words, Venerable Kaccana has the great foundation of Buddhist teaching in terms of theories and practices, so he is qualified to understand Buddha's teaching regarding these metaphysical problems. It is reasonable that the brief sutra delivers profound content.

The Buddha defines the right view and mentions the origination and cessation of the twelve links to shed light on the Middle Way. As depicted above, the level of right view in this sutra is insightful, which means direct realization of arising and ceasing phenomena, the Four Noble Truths, or the twelve links. Once the Buddha mentions the Middle Way via listing chains in the twelve links, the Venerable Kaccana, with his foundation, immediately understands that

applying the Eightfold path to eliminate cravings and ignorance, or one of the twelve links. In other words, the framework of the Four Noble Truths is a formula to eliminate any arising phenomena or suffering based on the Eightfold Path.

4.2 The Middle Way in the Lankavatara Sutra

The Middle Way philosophy is expressed implicitly throughout the entire sutra by using skillful means to transcend extremes. As depicted above, the reason for multiple skillful means is to adapt to different people. Despite different skillful means, all of them help people reach the same goal, that is, self-realization to transcend dualistic extremes. The Lanakavatara sutra mentions two important concepts such as discrimination (Vikalpa) and false imagination (Parikalpita). Both of them are considered ignorance-based contacts, which lead to clinging to wrong views and the self. In a well-known rubber hand illusion experiment, Rohde et al. (2011) found that a person joining the experiment feels the touch on the rubber hand as their own, which reveals that the visual perspective and touching feelings contribute to the illusion of ownership of the rubber hand. Therefore, this rubber hand illusion experiment is evidence for doctrines of Mind-only and concepts such as discrimination and false imagination, because what people perceive is only projections of the mind.

4.3 Comparison between the Middle Way in the Kaccanagotta Sutta and the Lankavatara Sutra

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Middle Way often relates to Nagarjuna's philosophy or the Madhyamaka school, but the term is not mentioned explicitly in the sutra. Although the Buddha discovered the Middle Way and stated that it is the ancient path that all previous Buddhas

followed to reach enlightenment. I hypothesize that later Buddhist scriptures focused on the insight to directly realize reality as it is, rather than being attached to concepts. The early Buddhism focuses on suffering, impermanence, and the non-self, but they don't sound good for some people who value cravings. Therefore, changing the Dhamma description to attract more universal people because the goal is to recognize Dhamma directly. Moreover, doing so helps Buddhists avoid attaching to the Buddhist concepts without thinking and practicing, or they don't turn them into their daily lives. Some people don't like listening to impermanence, suffering, and non-self, so using skillful means, aligning with their interests, attracts their attention.

4.4 Nagarjuna as a Fulcrum for the Middle Way

Nagarjuna's work, particularly the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, represents a crucial development that systematically bridges concepts found in early discourses, like the Kaccānagotta Sutta, with the early Mahāyāna emphasis on emptiness (śūnyatā). Nāgārjuna explicitly grounds his arguments in earlier teachings while simultaneously establishing the Madhyamaka school, which equates the Middle Way with emptiness arising from dependent origination. His approach wasn't necessarily an innovation out of nowhere, but a rigorous philosophical clarification and systematization of the implications found in texts like Kaccānagotta. Discussing Nāgārjuna highlights how the Middle Way evolved from a principle countering specific extremes in early dialogues to becoming the cornerstone of a major Mahāyāna philosophical school, demonstrating continuity alongside development within Buddhist thought. His work serves as a lens through which the relationship between the perspectives found in Kaccānagotta and the broader Mahāyāna concepts (including those in Lankāvatāra, though the latter is typically associated more with Yogācāra) can be understood.

The differences right view and self-realization from the perspective of the five dharmas. Seeing arising and ceasing phenomena, but it still attached to specfic objects. Observing impermerancne is the importance step in Theravada Traiditons. Suchness is the level of the Buddha, which is central teaching of Mahayana buddhism. It is very cofusing to understand, but if we look on vansubandut's treatisde eliminate obstacles in misunderstadning.

4.5 Emptiness (Śūnyatā): The Definitive Middle Way?

While both texts analyzed aim to articulate a path beyond extremes, the Mahāyāna tradition, heavily influenced by Nāgārjuna and Prajñāpāramitā literature, often explicitly equates the Middle Way with the realization of emptiness (śūnyatā). This concept warrants deeper discussion as the core philosophical expression of the Middle Way in the Mahāyāna context. Understanding phenomena as "empty" means recognizing they lack intrinsic, independent existence (svabhāva) precisely because they arise dependently (pratītyasamutpāda). This insight directly counters eternalism (which posits svabhāva) and nihilism (which might deny conventional reality altogether). Emptiness asserts that because things lack inherent existence, they can function, change, and interact conditionally. Even emptiness itself is considered empty of inherent existence, preventing it from becoming another fixed view or absolute. While the Lankāvatāra also discusses emptiness extensively, its interpretation is often filtered through the lens of Mind-Only, focusing perhaps more on the emptiness of the subject-object duality than the universal lack of svabhāva emphasized by Madhyamaka. Exploring these nuances clarifies how emptiness serves as the philosophical bedrock for the Middle Way in much of Mahāyāna, which represents a radical deconstruction of reified views about reality.

4.6 Divergent Philosophical Methodologies

Beyond the doctrinal content, the methods employed in the Kaccānagotta Sutta and the Lankāvatāra Sūtra differ significantly, so it reflects their distinct contexts and aims. The Kaccānagotta Sutta uses a relatively direct, concise, and analytical approach, characteristic of early Buddhist dialogues. The Buddha defines the problem (reliance on existence/non-existence), identifies the error, and provides the corrective principle (seeing arising and cessation via Dependent Origination). The Lankāvatāra, however, employs a much more varied and complex methodology. It utilizes extended dialogues, often with the advanced figure of Bodhisattva Mahāmati, incorporates elaborate lists (e.g., seven kinds of emptiness, five dharmas), employs vivid metaphors, critiques various philosophical schools, and often presents teachings in paradoxical or non-linear ways. This more elaborate, sometimes seemingly unsystematic style might be intended to engage the listener on multiple levels—intellectual, imaginative, and intuitive, perhaps reflecting the Mahāyāna emphasis on transcending purely conceptual understanding. It contrasts with the rigorous, deconstructive dialectic (prasanga, catuşkoți) favored by Nāgārjuna, suggesting diverse methodological approaches even within broader Mahāyāna thought for articulating truths related to the Middle Way.

4.7 Potential Implications for Practice

While this thesis focuses primarily on philosophical interpretation, the different articulations of the Middle Way naturally suggest potential differences in practical application. The Kaccānagotta Sutta's emphasis on observing the arising and cessation of phenomena through the lens of Dependent Origination aligns closely with insight meditation (Vipassanā) practices focused on mindfulness of the aggregates and sense spheres to directly perceive impermanence, suffering, and non-self. The path involves cultivating ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom

(the Eightfold Path) to facilitate this direct seeing. The Lankāvatāra Sūtra, with its emphasis on Mind-Only and the transformation of the basis of consciousness (parāvṛtti), might imply practices more focused on probing the nature of mind itself, deconstructing perception, working with visualizations or koan-like paradoxes (as seen in Zen, which was heavily influenced by this sutra), or cultivating faith in the inherent Buddha-Nature alongside wisdom. Although both paths aim at liberation from clinging and delusion, the specific meditative techniques and the psychological emphasis might differ, they reflect the distinct philosophical maps provided by each text for navigating the Middle Way. Exploring these practical dimensions further, though beyond the scope of this specific analysis, remains a crucial aspect of understanding the lived reality of these teachings.

5. Chapter Five: Conclusion

The Kaccānagotta Sutta presents the Middle Way as an ontological corrective, moving beyond the common worldly reliance on the dualistic concepts of 'existence' (atthitañceva) and 'non-existence' (natthitañca). The Buddha explains to Venerable Kaccānagotta that truly understanding the origin of the world with right understanding (sammappaññāya) prevents falling into the notion of non-existence, while truly seeing the cessation of the world prevents falling into the notion of existence. This insight is defined as the Right View (sammādiṭṭhi). It arises from observing the arising and passing of suffering without craving, clinging, attachment, mental insistence, or underlying tendencies, leading to knowledge that is independent and not reliant on others. The sutta implicitly links these extremes to the chain of Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda), where ignorance-based contact leads to craving and clinging, including clinging to views and the doctrine of the self. The Middle Way, therefore, involves cultivating wisdom (paññā)—both conceptual and experiential—through the Eightfold Path to see the conditioned nature of reality and cease the ignorance and craving that fuel attachment to these extremes. This interpretation anchors the Middle Way in the core Theravāda framework of Dependent Origination and the practical cultivation of wisdom based on the Eightfold Path. It offers a clear, process-oriented method for dismantling fundamental misconceptions about reality and the self, which directly address the roots of suffering identified in early Buddhist teachings.

The Lankāvatāra Sūtra implicitly frames the Middle Way within a complex Mahāyāna system, using multiple doctrines as skillful means (upāya) to guide Bodhisattvas beyond dualistic thinking. Central is Mind-Only (Cittamātra), asserting that the perceived world arises from karmic habit-energy (vāsanā) in the storehouse consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), not external

reality. Emptiness (Śūnyatā) is presented in multiple forms (e.g., emptiness of individual marks, self-nature, mutuality, etc.) to show the lack of inherent existence (svabhāva) in all phenomena. Non-Duality (Advaya) directly attacks the mind's tendency for discrimination (vikalpa) which creates false oppositions like subject/object or samsara/nirvana. The text critiques reliance on language and speculative philosophy and outlines the Five Dharmas (appearance, name, discrimination, right knowledge, suchness) as a progression towards realization. Even Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-Nature), while potentially sounding substantial, is presented as an upāya to counter fear of emptiness and nihilism, equated ultimately with emptiness itself. These teachings aim to induce a "turning about" (parāvṛitti) in the basis of consciousness, culminating in Self-Realization (pratyātma-gati)—a direct, non-conceptual gnosis beyond all extremes. The Lankāvatāra's approach reflects the Mahāyāna emphasis on consciousness and the Bodhisattva path. It provides a various skillfull means to deconstruct the illsuion of reality at multiple levels, so it suggests a path to eliminate clinging and the very structure of discriminative thought, which aims for a profound, transformative realization beyond intellectual grasp.

The comparison reveals significant differences in approach despite the shared goal of transcending extremes. Ontologically, Kaccānagotta focuses on interdependent processes and conditionality, while Lankāvatāra focuses on mental construction and the nature of consciousness. The source of error differs: Kaccānagotta points to ignorance-based sensory contact leading to craving/clinging, whereas Lankāvatāra emphasizes false imagination (parikalpita) and discrimination (vikalpa) rooted in the ālaya-vijñāna. Consequently, their skillful means diverge: Kaccānagotta uses the direct explanation of Dependent Origination, while Lankāvatāra employs a diverse set of doctrines such as Mind-Only, Emptiness, as targeted antidotes. Finally, Kaccānagotta leads to Right View as non-clinging experiential awareness,

while Lankāvatāra aims for Self-Realization as a transcendent state beyond all views and concepts. This comparison proves the evolution and diversification of Buddhist thought. The Middle Way remains central, but the path is conceptualized and taught differently, likely reflecting developments in philosophical understanding, changing historical contexts, and perhaps different target audiences within the Sravaka and Bodhisattva paths.

Although Lankāvatāra Section LXII clearly echoes Kaccānagotta Sutta's rejection of existence (realism) and non-existence (nihilism) as the two extremes people depend upon, a closer look confirms they are not identical. The foundational principle used to transcend these extremes differs: Kaccānagotta relies explicitly on Dependent Origination (arising counters non-existence, ceasing counters existence), while Lankāvatāra LXII invokes the realization that the perceived world is Mind-Itself and achieving the "essence of suchness (tathatā)" by ceasing mental discrimination. Furthermore, the contexts diverge sharply: Kaccānagotta features a historical disciple (Venerable Kaccānagotta) asking about Right View in Sāvatthī, whereas Lankāvatāra LXII features a Bodhisattva (Mahāmati) asking about being/nonbeing for the sake of supreme enlightenment in mythical Lanka. Lankāvatāra LXII also includes stronger warnings against misinterpreting emptiness, reflecting later Mahāyāna concerns. This specific comparison reinforces the broader finding that even when addressing the same core philosophical problem, the framing and solution are filtered through the unique lens of each tradition's developed doctrines and context. It highlights how Mahāyāna texts often incorporated and reinterpreted earlier teachings within their expanded philosophical landscape.

From the perspectives of practice, the Middle Way from the Theravada approach offers people practical methods to practice from the level of beginners, such as moral practices and

concentration. When they practice enough, they reach the higher levels of self-realization mentioned in the Lankāvatāra sutra. In other words, people who encounter the Middle Way or different schools in Mahayana Buddhism from the begingin misunderstand Buddhist teachings because of difficult concepts in the doctrines and lack basic practices.

Weaknesses

The acknowledged reliance on Suzuki's translation and commentary is a significant potential weakness, especially when interpreting complex concepts like Cittamātra, Ālayavijñāna, and Tathāgatagarbha. Suzuki had his own interpretations influenced by Zen, and the analysis might inadvertently adopt these without critically engaging alternative scholarly views on the Lankāvatāra. Furthermore, analyzing the Lankavatara sutra is not supported by contemporary studies and here are not lots of current researches for the Lankavatara sutra.

Strength

The analysis successfully identifies and explains the core interpretation of the Middle Way in this sutta: avoiding ontological extremes such as existence and non-existence through understanding Dependent Origination and cultivating Right View. The analysis clearly defines Right View in this context as the insight into the arising and cessation of suffering/phenomena without clinging, aligning with the sutta's explicit definition. The comparison successfully highlights the fundamental differences in approach—process/conditionality focus in Kaccānagotta versus consciousness/cognitive focus in Lankāvatāra, the distinct sources of error identified, and the differing nature of their skillful means and culminating insights. The analysis accurately identifies the shared starting point (rejecting existence/non-existence) but effectively

argues against their identity by pinpointing the crucial difference in the foundational principle used to explain the transcendence (Dependent Origination vs. Mind-Only/Suchness)

Future research

This thesis would benefit from further research comparing Vipassana and Zen Buddhism to shed light on the understanding of the Middle Way in various practices. A comparative analysis of Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and the concept of the Middle Way in Theravāda Buddhism should also be undertaken to explore similarities and differences across traditions. More studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the Middle Way and bridge gaps in interpretation across Buddhist schools. Additionally, a comparative examination of between the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra in Sanrkit version, its Chinese and Tibetan versions can reveal both textual and doctrinal variations. Furthermore, these research questions above also highlight the significant role of the six sense bases (ṣaḍāyatana) in the arising of craving and ignorance. As this concept is central in the Samyukta Nikaya, it would be valuable to compare its treatment there with corresponding discussions in Mahāyāna texts such as the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. Further comparative analysis of foundational concepts in the Pāli Canon and Mahāyāna scriptures could deepen our understanding and promote dialogue between the two major Buddhist traditions.

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